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## JESSE JAMES, THE MIDNIGHT HORSEMAN; OR, THE SILENT RIDER OF THE OZARK.

By D. W. STEVENS.



They reached the widow's house before Ben Morgan and the rescued Grace arrived. "See if the old woman is still tied," said Jesse. "Flash your light in at this window." Jesse did so, and Mrs. Harvey was seen tied in a chair, with a handkerchief over her mouth.





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## Jesse James, the Midnight Horseman; OR, THE SILENT RIDER OF THE OZARK.

A TRUE STORY OF THE SOUTHWEST.

By D. W. STEVENS,

Author of "Pinkerton's Boy Detective's; or, Trying to Capture the James Boys," etc., etc., etc.

### CHAPTER I. HACKETT'S STORE.

ONE dark night, several years ago, a man mounted on a large black horse was riding slowly along a lonely road which led through the Ozark Mountains.

There was something about the man which at first glance struck the beholder as remarkable. He wore a broad-brimmed sombrero on his head, beneath which his long, dark-brown hair hung almost to his shoulders.

One at seeing him was conscious of a pair of basilisk eyes, keen as a hawk's, a long, dark beard and prominent features. He wore an army overcoat, beneath which was the buckle of a belt supporting a brace of revolvers.

The dark horseman was mounted on a blooded steed.

One need only glance at him to realize that.

The horse was coal black. There was not a white hair on him. When the sun shone on his delicate skin, as soft and smooth as velvet, it reflected the rays like a polished mirror.

That horse would have been the pride of any joekey. His long, clean limbs, his massive chest and excellent form denoted both speed and endurance.

Had he been placed on the turf, there is no doubt but that he would have been the favorite.

The rider drew rein on a plateau, which formed a sort of spur of the mountain, and took from an inside pocket of his coat a small lantern.

Lighting the lantern, he sprung the slide some half a dozen times, making as many flashes in as many seconds.

Having done this, the silent rider wheel-

ed his steed about and disappeared between two towering cliffs that rose up behind him.

Scarcely five minutes had elapsed ere there came a scrambling of feet like horsemen ascending a steep embankment.

The sounds of hoofs were heard but a moment, when right and left, almost at the same moment, could be discerned two horsemen approaching each other.

They met on the plateau, halting within ten paces of each other, each holding a cocked pistol in his hand; they almost simultaneously cried:

"Halt!"

"Halt!"

The commands or cries were in an undertone, but loud enough and firm enough to be heard and understood by each other.

"Who are you?" asked one.

"Frank, is it you?" asked the other.

"Yes."

"Don't you know me?"

"Yes."

"It's Jim."

"I know it."

"Come here."

Again their horses advanced until they met.

"Did you see it, Jim?" asked the man called Frank.

"Yes."

"You know what it is?"

"Of course it was Jesse's signal."

"But where is Jesse?"

"I don't know."

"Maybe it wasn't him."

"Oh, yes, I know it was. Six quick, sudden flashes. There can't be any mistake about it, I know."

"What work has he on hand to-night?"

"Perhaps it's Hackett's store."

"Hush!"

"Do you hear some one?"

"I hear something."

"Which direction?"

The horseman answered the question by pointing his finger in the direction of the two cliffs which rose to a height of one hundred feet in their rear.

"Is it there?" Jim asked in a whisper.

"Yes."

They had their revolvers in their hands and turned their eyes in the direction of the road through the bluff. Their revolvers were half raised, when the low, strange whistle like the warbling of a bird reached their ears.

The half-raised revolvers were lowered and both uttered the one word:

"Jesse."

They spoke in an undertone which could scarce be heard five paces away.

The only answer was the flash from the lantern which revealed the dark, silent horseman.

"It's Jesse."

"Yes."

"Where shall we go?"

"What shall we do, Jesse?"

The man on the large black horse signaled them to follow him, and wheeling his horse about rode away.

Just as he turned around an angle in the road, the two followers spurred their horses forward and came up with him.

Not a word had been spoken by the silent horseman on the black steed. He seemed to rule his followers by a gesture or wave of the hand, or a flash of his lantern.

We must invite the reader to accompany us to Hackett's store, which was located at the foot of the mountain.

Jerry Hackett kept what was called a



general store. It was well named, for in this store could be found everything from a handsaw to an elephant. Dry goods, groceries, hardware, millinery, books and stationery, drugs, paints and medicines, and in fact everything.

Mr. Jerry Hackett was in reality the great nabob of the country.

Everybody called him Unele Jerry.

He had a big iron safe, in which he not only kept his own money—a considerable sum—but all his neighbors deposited their cash with him, tying it up in strong bags and labelling it.

Uncle Jerry had made a fortune with his mountain store.

He was rich but peculiar, and clung to his old ways and the old neighborhood in which his fortune had been made.

On the night that the three horsemen met on the plateau of the Ozark Mountains, as usual, a dozen or more loafers were lingering about Uncle Jerry's store.

A young fellow with faded blue eyes and nineteen or twenty whiskers on his chin, who was commonly denominated Cock Robin, was talking in an excited manner.

"I tell yer, I saw 'im myself," assented Cock Robin, vehemently.

"When?"

"Only last night."

"Whar?"

"On ther mounting."

"Sho', Cock Robin, yer war drunk," declared a middle-aged man, with a short, grizzled beard on his face.

"No, I warn't, Flatfoot. I tell yer I warn't so drunk I didn't know him."

"Did ye ever see him afore?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"I've seen that air Midnight Hossman fur three nights hand goin'."

"Allus on the mountains?" asked Flatfoot Jim.

"Yes."

"Wot's he like?"

"He's er big man, with wildish sort uv a look erbout him. He's got ther awfullest höss yer ever see. Why, that air höss hez eyes o' fire."

"Cock Robin, yer war drunk."

"No, I warn't."

"Yer war."

"I tell yer, Flatfoot Jim, I know when I got too much corn-juice an' when I ain't, an' I war all right them times. That air höss o' ther Midnight Hossman give er snort, an' blame me, ef I didn't see blazes o' fire come out o' his nostrils ez long ez my arm."

At this there was a roar of laughter at the expense of Cock Robin.

Cock Robin was famous as the neighborhood liar. All his falsehoods, however, were innocent exaggerations, and he never got people into trouble with them.

The laughter was not general at Cock Robin's assertion. Old Hardtack, an old veteran soldier, who sat on the wood box near the stove smoking his short, black pipe, did not even smile. As soon as all ceased laughing, he rose and asked:

"Wall, comrades, wot yer larfin' at? Do any o' yer know?"

"Did ye heer wot Cock Robin said?" asked Flatfoot Jim Toney.

"Course I did."

"Do ye believe it?"

"Say, comrade, d'yer doubt them stories erbout ther 'Silent Rider—ther Midnight Hossman?"

Hardtack was well known at the store.

He was head sawyer at the mill, and considered a man of great wisdom.

"Did ye ever see him, Hardtack?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Last night."

"Last night?"

"Yes."

"Whar?"

Everybody was interested.

All believed that what old Hardtack said was true.

If Hardtack had seen the Midnight Horseman, then the question was settled beyond dispute that the mysterious gentleman was a reality.

"Now, ef ye'll keep yer clatterin' tongues still, I'll spin yer a yarn wot's true ez gospil, an' I don't keer one consarned cent whether yer believe it or not."

"Go on, Hardtack."

"Wall, I went home last night er feelin' purty nigh tuckered out. Yer see off bearin' all day mighty nigh wears er feller out."

"I went home an' went ter sleep."

"Yisterday old Tom Lofton war at ther mill tellin' erbout that feller wot they call ther Silent Rider."

"Tom sed he had seed him only er day er two ergo, an' wanted ter know wot he wanted in this country."

"Now Tom Lofton air mightily givin' ter lyin', an' I war a leetle mite in doubt whether he had ever seen the Midnight Horseman er not."

"But ther story he tole me kept er barin' on my mind, an' fur a long time arter I went ter bed I laid erwake wonderin' ef Tom had been lyin' ter me or not."

"By and by I fell ersleep, an' so much war I impressed wi' ther story o' ther man on ther black höss, that I dreamed o' bein' out in ther mountains, an' he tuk arter me. He war so clus on ter me, thet I seed he war goin' ter ketch me, an' I war comin' ter a preeerpace."

"I hed ter jump over ther bluff or be killed."

"Wall, while debatin', I fell over ther bluff, I guess near on ter a thousand feet. It waked me, an' I looked out o' ther winder and saw ther moon a-shinin' on ther mountain side."

"I riz up, wiped ther cold sweat off my face an' then I lay down agin an' tried ter sleep."

"Jist then I heerd er höss a-comin' gallopin' down the mountain. Boys, yer may think I war er fool, but I jist hid my head under ther bed cover."

"I knowed who et war."

"How did yer know?" asked Cock Robin.

"Wall, Cock Robin, et war instinct, I reekin'."

"Wot's instinct?"

"I can't tell yer. I ain't responsible fer yer hevin' no edgercation, Cock Robin."

"Go on, an' never mind Cock Robin."

"I will, Jim," resumed old Hardtack. "Now I knowed that air feller war thar at my winder lookin' in afore I looked up. I did look up at last, an' sure enuff, ez I am er white man, thar sot ther Midnight Horseman in his saddle."

"What did he say?"

"Nothin'."

"What did he do?"

"Nothin'. He jist sot thar on his höss an' looked at me. Et seems, from wot I kin hear erbout him, that this Midnight Horseman seldom speaks ter any one."

"That's what I have heard," said Uncle Jerry Hackett.

"Yes; he hardly ever speaks—"

At this moment the door opened and a young man entered.

It was Ben Morgan, the clerk of Mr. Hackett.

His face was flushed and he was greatly excited.

"Mr. Hackett, I want the gun," he said.

"Why?" asked several.

"He is coming down the mountain."

"Who, in ther name o' Tom Walker, air comin' down ther mountain?"

"The Midnight Horseman."

At mention of the Midnight Horseman every man was on his feet.

"Where is he?"

"Did ye see him?"

"Is he comin' this way?"

The mysterious, silent rider had inspired them with a sort of superstitious dread, which they could not wholly overcome.

Some leaped out of the windows and ran toward their homes.

Cock Robin escaped by the back door and ran to the saw-mill, where he hid himself.

Ben Morgan seized a rifle and ran out at the door.

In his haste he never took the pains to see if the gun was loaded or empty, but supposed it was loaded.

The man whom we have described as the Midnight Horseman was riding slowly down the mountain when a voice in the thicket at his side cried:

"Halt!"

Next moment the barrel of a gun protruded from the bushes and a young man followed it. He came out into the road to within half a dozen paces of the man on the horse, and said in a calm, deliberate manner:

"Stop, sir! I am going to know something about you and what your business in the Ozarks is."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE RESCUE.

A LOOK of contempt rather than fear was on the face of the horseman.

"Put down that gun."

He spoke in a low, hoarse voice. His voice though low was quite distinct.

"I'll know who you are," answered Tom, still keeping him covered.

"Will you?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Dismount."

"I will not."

"You shall."

The stranger shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"Whenever one says another shall do anything it implies that he will use force if his request is not granted."

"You're about right, stranger."

"If you mean to infer I shall dismount, you are mistaken."

"You will get out of that saddle, dead or alive. Which shall it be?"

"It will not be alive."

"Then be it dead."

Ben Morgan was very rash and hasty.

He pulled the trigger.

Click! went the gun-lock.

It was a dull, empty eliek, and then the young fellow realized for the first time that the gun was not loaded.

The silent rider gave utterance to a low, husky laugh.

He drew a revolver, and Ben Morgan, seeing his danger, attempted to retreat. He ran backward, stumbled, and in his efforts to elumb upon a large flat stone, he fell upon it.

The silent rider dashed his horse quite up to the stone, and placing the muzzle of his revolver against Ben's forehead, said:

"Fool—don't you see I could kill you if I would?"

"Yes," Ben answered.

"But I won't. No, I will give you one more chance. Now, take a bit of good advice and you may live; refuse to take it and you will have your throat cut or brains blown out."

"What is your advice?" Ben asked.



"Don't meddle with my affairs. Don't try to play the spy on me."

"Who are you?"

"Don't ask—go!"

With this he gave Ben a savage push, hurling him over on the other side of a great block of stone, where he fell with such force as to almost stun him.

When he got upon his feet again the Midnight Horseman had disappeared.

Ben left the empty gun lying in the road, went toward the stone and met Mr. Hackett, his son Tom and old Hardtaek coming up the hill.

"Hello, Ben! Have you seen him?" Mr. Hackett asked.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Up this road."

Ben then told his adventure, omitting no part of it.

When he had finished Mr. Hackett said:

"What is the mystery about this fellow? It's too deep for us to fathom."

Further search for the silent horseman failed to discover him, and they returned to the store.

They had almost reached it, when they heard the rapid tramp of feet coming toward them.

"Hello! who is that?" asked the merchant.

"It's a boy."

A boy it proved to be, and Ben Morgan recognized him at once as John Harvey, the son of Mrs. Sarah Harvey, a widow who lived in the valley.

"What is wrong, John?" asked Ben Morgan, hastening to meet the little fellow.

"If you please," began the boy, panting and almost out of breath, "mother is very much frightened."

"At what?"

"Cousin Silas Flynn, who has been asking Grace to marry him, was at our house—"

The boy paused for breath.

"When?" asked Ben, eagerly.

"This evening."

"What did he want?"

"He was very mad and swore he would be avenged. There was something about some papers."

"What papers?" asked Ben Morgan.

"I don't know," the boy answered. "I could not understand it all—it was very strange to me. Mother understands what he means, I suppose. But that was not what I wanted to tell you."

"What did you want to tell me?"

"You see, mother, she says that at dark three men were seen close to the house all with black masks over their faces—"

Ben Morgan did not stop to hear any more. He was thoroughly aroused now and ran back to the store, to which Mr. Hackett had also returned.

"Mr. Hackett," he said, "I want two revolvers."

"Have you found him again?"

"No, but a wrong is about to be done Mrs. Harvey or her daughter."

Hackett's store contained fire-arms among the general stock. Ben Morgan selected a brace of Smith & Wesson revolvers and loaded them. He put a box of cartridges in his pocket and ran from the store.

No one sought to stay the young clerk and all were too much dumfounded to be inquisitive, and he was gone ere they could ask a question.

Then they turned upon the boy and plied him with questions, until the little fellow was bewildered.

Meanwhile, Ben Morgan with rapid strides was hastening along the rugged

mountain path as rapidly as his legs would carry him.

About a mile yet remained for him to travel before he reached the house of the widow.

He was hurrying along as fast as he could go, for he felt an instinctive dread that all was not right. Suddenly he heard footsteps coming toward him.

He paused.

Then a voice said:

"Come on—come on!"

"Who is it?" he asked himself. "Maybe it is the James Boys engaged upon some depredation of theirs."

He crept out to one side of the road and crouched down among some bushes.

"I will listen and see who and what they are," he thought.

"Come on—come on!" growled a low, deep voice. "What makes you so slow?"

"This is a rough road," answered another.

"And she is no light burden."

"No."

"Has she come to?"

"No."

"Maybe she is dead."

"Well, that would be awkward."

"Yes."

"We had no authority to kill her," answered the first speaker. "Fact is, we were not to harm her. That was in the bargain."

By this time Ben Morgan was puzzling his brain to reason out who they meant by she. It seemed to him a case of abduction, and his heart almost stood still when he thought—

"Perhaps it is Grace Harvey."

Ben Morgan was Grace's lover, and Silas Flynn, a distant relative of her, his rival.

Silas was a young man of questionable morals. It was said he drank and gambled, and it was once thought he had given the James Boys information concerning a stage-coach across the mountains. But there was never any direct proof against him, and he was never arrested.

"Yes, if she was to die," said a voice from the darkness, "a pretty kettle of fish we would fry, wouldn't we?"

"It wouldn't do."

"Sit down and rest. Take the chloroform from her nose."

Then he heard another say:

"Have not had the handkerchief to her nose for ten minutes."

The men, three in number, sat down.

"Have you any water?"

"No; here's brandy."

"It's better."

"Bathe her face with it."

Ben Morgan silently cocked his pistol and waited.

It was now so dark that he could only make out three forms before him. They were three burly men, carrying some one between them.

A few moments later, he heard a gasp for breath.

"There she comes to herself."

There was no doubt but that she was reviving, and a moment later a well-known voice spoke:

"Where am I? It's so dark I can't see. Mother—mother!"

"It's Grace!" thought Ben Morgan, starting to his feet and grasping his revolver in his hand.

It was Grace Harvey who had been abducted by the three masked men, whom Mrs. Harvey had seen early in the evening lurking about the house.

"Shet up, girl—don't ye go to givin' us any o' yer chin-music, or it will be worse for you," growled the first speaker.

"Who are you?"

"I am one that won't be fooled with,"

answered the harsh, hoarse voice of the first speaker.

"What does this mean?" she asked.

"Keep a silent tongue in your head."

"I will know the meaning of this!"

Then the prisoner made a bound to get away but her hands were held.

"No, you don't, my girl."

"I will go—help, help, help!"

"No one can hear you—"

"Liar! some one does hear!" cried Ben Morgan, and he bounded like an enraged tiger at the men with their captive.

"Who is that?"

"Halt!"

"Look out!"

The three guards challenged the man who was advancing, yet he came on.

Bang!

Bang! went a brace of shots, and the bullets came whizzing one on each side of Ben's head. But they did not detain him a single second. Grace was in danger and he was as ferocious as a caged lion.

He dared not fire, lest he would hit her, but with his pistols in his hands, he rushed at them and struck blows right and left.

Down went two of the abductors.

The third ran away.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang! went three shots after the fugitive, but he ran for life down the hill into the wood.

It was too dark to fire with any degree of accuracy, and he missed the abductor.

"Grace—Grace!" he called.

"Ben, is it you?"

"Yes."

"Where are you?"

"Here."

It was so dark and she was so much bewildered that she could not see him. Having hardly recovered from the effects of the chloroform she was unable to stand on her feet.

"Grace, what does this mean?" he asked, lifting her to her feet.

"I don't know. I was in my room. Some one raised a window and leaped in. A shawl was thrown over my head and I became unconscious."

"You were abducted?"

"I suppose so."

"Do you know who those men are who carried you away?"

"No."

"What was their motive?"

"I don't know. I remember hearing them ask mother something about papers—there was the papers of Joe Young—"

Suddenly she stopped and clasped her hands and cried:

"Let us go back—let us hasten home at once."

"Why?"

"I remember now that mother was seized and bound. She may die. Let us hasten."

Grace was wild with grief and anxiety.

"I will secure these villains first and see what they have to say," returned Ben Morgan, and he turned about to find the men he had knocked down. They had disappeared.

"Gone—escaped!" groaned Ben Morgan.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE SILENT RIDER.

THE silent rider, who was none other than Jesse James, that bandit who had gained a world-wide reputation as the most daring man living, left the vicinity of Hackett's store and galloped across a ridge and some foot hills which were the outskirts of the Ozark Mountains.

"That was a close shave," Jesse James thought while contemplating his recent



adventure with Ben Morgan. "Had the young fool's gun been loaded he would have killed me. Now, if I knew when they had the most money in old Jerry Hackett's big iron safe, we would make a strike for it."

At this moment Siroc, his famous horse, gave vent to a terrible snort, and struck the stony earth with his feet until the sparks emitted therefrom danced in a shower over the earth.

"Some one comes!" whispered Jesse. "Easy, Siroc."

The animal became motionless and silent as a statue.

Jesse led him behind some bushes and left him there, while he crept back to the road. He heard a man coming slowly up the mountain side talking to himself as he came.

"Now if Ned, Bill and Tom do their work we'll have the girl. But will that avail anything without the will? I told them to search the house and tie and gag the old woman. I don't want anybody killed if it can be avoided, but Uncle Joe Young shall not cut me off without a penny."

He was in a few paces of Jesse James when he gave utterance to the above soliloquy.

There was just enough in that soliloquy to convince the bandit king of America that the man was a villain. He also knew that there was a chance for him to turn this fellow's villainy to some advantage.

The man stopped at last almost opposite Jesse, and the bandit chief crept forward in the darkness and laid the muzzle of his revolver against his temple. The touch of the cold ring of iron on his face was the first warning that Silas Flynn had of the near proximity of any one.

He started back, but Jesse seized his throat and said:

"Don't you move or try to escape. We may be friends, after all."

"Who are you?"

"The Midnight Horseman."

"Oh, you are the man I have heard about—the mysterious Silent Rider of the Ozark?"

"I am. You are Silas Flynn?"

"Yes."

"You want to get at the will of Joe Young, your uncle?"

"How do you know?"

"I heard you say as much. Do you want to destroy the will?"

"No."

"Does he disinherit you?"

"Not if I marry Grace Harvey."

"If you do, what does the will provide?"

"The fortune, to the amount of millions, is divided between us; if we do not marry, it goes to some charitable institution."

"I understand. You want to prevent that will being probated until you and Grace are married?"

"Yes—can you help me?"

"Perhaps."

"Perhaps! Could you, if you would?"

"Of course."

"Well, how can I interest you?" asked the scheming Silas.

With a quiet laugh, the silent rider replied:

"Show me money enough in it to interest me, and the work will be done, and done handsomely."

For a long time Silas Flynn was silent, evidently calculating how he could make the best terms with him. Then he said:

"Would one-third of two millions pay you?"

"Yes; is it sure?"

"If manipulated rightly it is sure. And

you are the one who can do that little job artistically and in style."

"Thank you."

"Will you undertake it?"

"Perhaps I shall, but I must investigate the matter a little more closely before giving my opinion on the matter."

Before anything more could be said, they were startled by hearing footsteps approaching, just as Silas was about to tell of the three men he had sent to abduct Grace.

"Who is there?" asked Jesse.

Both started to their feet. Next moment both had a man by the throat, holding him down.

"Hold, hold! Silas, it's me—Ned Ambrose!"

"Where is she?" asked Silas Flynn.

"Where is the girl, Grace Harvey?"

"Rescued."

"By whom?"

"Ben Morgan."

Flynn was in such a rage at first that he had to be restrained from killing them. But Jesse James got from the men a full account of all they had done, from the seizing and tying of Mrs. Harvey and abducting Grace to the rescue by Ben Morgan.

Jesse then took Flynn aside and said:

"Your men have made a great botch of this work."

"I know it."

"Now, if you expect success, this Ben Morgan must not reach Mrs. Harvey's house first. She is there tied and gagged. Let us go there at once and wait for him."

"Agreed."

"The papers may still be in her house."

"They may, but I believe they are at Hackett's store."

"Do you know a nearer way across the mountain to the widow's?"

"Yes, but your horse can't make it."

"How near can he go to the house?"

"Within half a mile."

"Go on."

They went on, Jesse leading Siroc after him. At first it was a serious question what they would do with the abductors, Ned Ambrose, Bill Shoemaker and Tom Toddy. It was finally decided by Jesse that they should not be permitted to go with them.

"They have made one bad break and we don't want any more blunders," remarked Jesse James.

Jesse had his lantern lighted, and, as he hurried over the hills, he occasionally flashed it to signal to his companions. These signals were rewarded at last by a whistle from the hills.

He was seen.

Then by three successive flashes he told them to follow him.

They had not overtaken him, when they came upon the chasm which they were compelled to cross on a log.

Jesse tied Siroc, saying:

"They will soon find him and stay with him until I come back."

He then crossed the creek, or chasm, with Flynn on a log. It was so dark at this place they were compelled to grope their way.

Having gained the other side, Silas said:

"Now, we will have to run to get there ahead of them."

"We will run, Flynn," Jesse answered; "but if the girl has been under the influence of chloroform she cannot travel very rapidly."

Jesse James was right in his calculation. They reached the widow's house before Ben Morgan and the rescued Grace arrived.

"See if the old woman is still tied," said Jesse.

"Flash your light in at this window."

Jesse did so, and Mrs. Harvey was seen tied in a chair, with a handkerchief over her mouth. They entered, and, after a whispered consultation, carried the captive to the cellar.

"Is she alive yet?" asked Silas.

"Yes; let us leave her here and go up and search for the papers."

"We will, for I know they were left with her. If she has them not, she has deposited them in Hackett's safe."

"Yes."

They went up-stairs and came to a room in which was a cabinet. Jesse forced it open and found a number of pigeon holes filled with papers. He was busily engaged in looking these over when Flynn, who was watching in the hall, whispered:

"Here they come."

Jesse turned off his light, and seizing his pistol, crept to the door.

They could hear the unsuspecting Ben Morgan speaking some words of encouragement to Grace.

"Cheer up, Grace, your mother will be soon at liberty."

Then he stepped in the doorway, and the silent rider waited for him, pistol in hand.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### BEN MORGAN'S VOW.

CHEER up, Grace, your mother will soon be free," said Ben, as he placed his foot on the door-step.

"Ben, stop!"

"Why?"

"The house seems so dark—so dangerous."

"There is no danger, Grace, unless it is to your mother. Let us haste to release her."

Grace was trembling like an aspen leaf. Morgan noticed that she was suffering from a severe nervous chill and said:

"I can't understand why you are so frightened, Grace. There is no cause. Come, let us go in."

Being thus emboldened by his cheering words, she pushed open the door opening into the hall.

All was darkness within.

Had not their own hearts beat so wildly that they could hear nothing, the suppressed breathing of the two men waiting for them would certainly have been heard.

They entered the hall.

Click! went the lantern slide.

A flood of light fell upon the face of Ben Morgan.

Ben had a cocked revolver in his hand—something that Jesse James and Silas Flynn had not calculated on.

Bang! went a shot.

It struck the lantern and all was total darkness.

Jesse James, though stunned by the shot which had knocked the lantern from his hand, struck with the butt of his revolver at Ben Morgan and knocked him down.

Grace Harvey, with a shriek of terror, fled from the door.

"The girl is gone!" cried Jesse James. "Run and seize her!"

Bewildered in the darkness, Silas Flynn gave chase after the girl.

Grace Harvey fled for her life. She knew not whither she was going. She was crazed with fear, blind and deaf from terror, and ran with all her powers of speed. By the merest accident she ran through the gate.

But she stumbled over the tongue of a wagon and fell.

"Aha! I am coming, my dear!" cried Silas Flynn, who heard her fall. "I will have you soon in these loving arms."



Stunned and confused, but with an instinctive idea of flight, she struggled to her feet. Again she ran.

"Stop, Grace!" cried Flynn.

Of course she paid no attention to him, but continued to fly.

"Stop, or I will shoot!"

Death was better than captivity, and she would have welcomed a bullet at that moment as a friend.

"Wait, Grace. Hold!" he cried.

She paid no heed to him.

But Silas could now penetrate the darkness with his eyes enough to see the outline of the terrified girl who fled through the woods.

He ran after her with full speed. He was gaining on her, and now was so close he could almost touch her shoulder.

"I will have you yet, Grace," he roared.

He seized her and she swooned. Then Silas raised the insensible girl in his arms and carried her back to the house.

On reaching the door, he called out:

"Are you there?"

"Yes," Jesse James answered. "Have you got her?"

"Yes."

"Bring her in."

Silas Flynn carried the insensible girl in the house, where he found the bandit king stooping over the insensible Ben Morgan, tying his hands.

"Is he dead?"

"No, only stunned. He will be all right in a few minutes."

"Why don't you kill him?" cried Silas.

"Oh, don't be so bloodthirsty," Jesse answered. "We can put Ben Morgan to a better purpose than killing him. Tie the girl while she is insensible."

"I have no rope or cord."

"I hope you would not be so ungallant as to tie a lady love with a rope or cord?"

"What then should I tie her with?" asked Silas.

"A handkerchief, so it will not hurt her wrists."

Growling as he tied her:

"I don't care for her wrists. I only intend marrying her to make assurances doubly sure about the fortune. My relative's will found and destroyed, she might go."

It was a truth that Silas Flynn cared very little for Grace. This fact made him a dangerous lover. Unscrupulous as he was, he would not have hesitated to murder her, had it suited his purpose as well.

In a few moments he had securely bound Grace and placed her on the sofa.

She was just regaining consciousness.

It was not long before Jesse had completed his work in tying Ben Morgan hard and fast.

"There, that is done!" he said.

"What are you going to do with him now that he is tied?" asked Silas.

"Isn't there a spare room or closet in which we can put him?"

"Yes; but why do that?"

"We don't want him seeing us when he recovers, or hearing what we say."

"No? Then why not turn him loose, or knock him on the head?"

Jesse James smiled and answered:

"My dear young friend, you seem to be rather unsophisticated. We are not going to give Ben his liberty just yet, nor kill him. I fancy he can be made to serve us better living than dead."

"How?"

"Well, I have my plans, which I will develop in due time. Just wait until we are ready. We can use Ben. Where will we dispose of him for the present?"

"There is a closet at one side of the hall," suggested Silas.

They dragged Ben there and threw him rather roughly on the floor.

A groan escaped his lips which gave evidence that he was returning to consciousness.

"Let us get back now and finish the search for the will."

They went into the room, and Jesse overhauled the secretary thoroughly but found on will.

"Then it's quite certain the papers are in Hackett's safe," said Silas.

"Hackett's safe must be a large one!" Jesse remarked.

"It is. Everybody deposits there."

"Then there is a great amount of money in it."

"In the safe?"

"Yes."

"Of course. I'll warrant you'll find more actual, real cash in Hackett's safe than you can find in any ordinary bank."

Jesse muttered under his breath:

"We will make a rich haul there."

Silas Flynn, who did not hear his remark, said:

"Let us go and see the old woman, and maybe we can make her tell where the papers are."

"Very well. She is in the cellar?"

"Yes."

"Come on!"

"Hold on a moment!"

"Why, what's the matter?"

"She will recognize me, and then the deuce will be to pay!"

Jesse put his hand in his coat pocket and pulled out two masks.

"Put on one of these," he said.

Silas did so, and the bandit put on the other.

They then hastened down into the cellar where the woman sat, tied and gagged, in a chair. Jesse unfastened the handkerchief which covered her mouth and said:

"Now, madam, can you speak?"

"Yes."

"Well, I want to know where the will of Mr. Joe Young, deceased, is?"

"I will not tell you."

"Do you know?"

"Not certainly."

"Have you an idea?"

"Yes."

"Would you tell me?"

"Not to save your life."

"Do it then to save your own."

"I won't!" she answered, sharply. "I know now what the object of this outrage is. It is to force me to give up the will. I will not do it. I will die first!"

Threats were in vain, consequently they left her.

"Who are you?" she asked, as Jesse bound a handkerchief tightly over her mouth.

"I am Valgeau, the Midnight Horseman," he answered.

They left her as they had found her, bound and gagged, and hurrying up-stairs, took Grace, who was beginning to recover and hurried away.

"What will you do with him?" asked Silas.

"Ben Morgan?"

"Yes."

"We will send some of my men over after him."

"Where are your men?"

"We will find them at the spot where I left Siroc."

Jesse carried the insensible girl in his great, strong arms as easily as if she had been a child. When they reached the great yawning chasm the girl had fully recovered.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"Keep quiet," said Jesse.

"Who are you, and where are you tak-

ing me?" she demanded, struggling to liberate herself.

"Be still, will ye?" said Jesse, in a terrible voice, as he placed one of his booted and spurred feet on the end of the log on his side of the chasm.

"I will not."

"Listen, don't you hear the roar and thunder of water below us?"

"Yes," she answered with a shudder.

"Well, a single false step may plunge us down to eternity. Beware how you make any disturbance."

She felt her blood run cold, as far down beneath them came the thunder and roar of water.

They crossed over and the low whinny of Siroc told the bandit chief where his faithful steed was waiting for him.

"Come on, Silas, we will bind them there," said Jesse James, and hastening forward they were soon challenged by:

"Who are you?"

"All right," Jesse James answered.

"Well, Jesse, come on."

"How many are here?" asked Jesse, as he advanced, carrying the insensible girl in his arms.

"Here is Frank James, Jim Cummins, Cole, Bob and Jim Younger," answered a voice, which he readily recognized as Cole Younger's.

"That is good! The very boys we need!"

"What's up, Jesse?"

"We are on a rich deal," Jesse James answered.

"Well, what is it?"

Jesse said:

"I can't explain it all to you now, but I want four of you to go across the gulch to the house in the valley beyond, and in the right hand closet you will find a man tied and gagged. Bring him to our hiding-place number two. Cole, stay with me. We will go to number one."

This arrangement made, Frank James, with Jim Cummins, Bob and Jim Younger, set out to the home of Mrs. Harvey.

Meanwhile, Ben Morgan had begun to revive. When he regained consciousness he was first sensible of a dull, aching pain in his head. At first he was confused and could not understand where he was or what had happened. His mouth was covered with a handkerchief and he could not speak. He could scarce breathe.

"Where am I?" he thought. "I remember now. I was coming with Grace into the house and something flashed in my face. I saw a man, fired, and felt a stinging blow. Am I wounded?"

It took him but a few moments to ascertain that he was tied and gagged.

"I understand it all now—"

His unpleasant reflections were at this point interrupted by the sound of a foot-fall near. Some one was in the house. He could hear them going carefully from room to room. At last the door of his closet was opened and the rays of a lantern fell on his face.

"Aha!" said the low, cautious voice. "Some one has been here. You are in limbo, I see."

The man set his lantern down, and by its light Ben got a glimpse of his face. He was a man apparently about thirty years of age, smooth shaved, with large ears, a large nose and thin lips. His eyes were blue and his hair, close cropped to his head, was of a light brown.

He stooped over the prisoner and released him.

"Who tied you?" he asked, in his even, cautious voice.

"I don't know."

"How did this happen?"

Ben told him all he knew, and at the conclusion of his story his liberator said:



"I think I understand a part of it, but not all. We have a clew, however, and we will work this clew until the whole mystery is unraveled."

"Who are you?" Ben asked.

"Never mind now. Let my name be a secret."

"I fancy you are a detective?"

"Well, fancy anything you like," answered the stranger, with a smile.

"There is a woman tied and gagged, if she be not murdered," said Ben.

"Then let us find her."

They began a search, and soon found Mrs. Harvey in the cellar.

It was some time after she was released before she could talk, and then she could tell nothing of her daughter, Grace, except that she had her suspicions that the two masked men who had paid her a visit had carried her away.

"They have," said Ben Morgan, "and I vow, as I hope for future happiness, that I will rescue her, come what may. I will find her, or devote my whole life to the search. If living she shall be rescued, if dead, avenged."

At this moment the stranger who had rescued him returned from the front door.

"Some one is coming," he said.

"Who?"

"I don't know, but I suspect that it is some of the James Boys' gang. Are you brave? Will you fight?"

"Yes."

"Take this pistol; you will need it."

He thrust a revolver in Ben's hand and added:

"Come this way to the front window; we will not let them get in the house."

Cocking their revolvers, they crept to the windows and knelt by the side of them, waiting for the enemy.

#### CHAPTER V.

"CALL ME VALGEAN."

"HERE they come," whispered Ben's companion.

"Can you see them?"

"Yes."

"How many are they?"

"Four."

"Do you know they are not some people from the village?"

"No, but you had better hail them and see. Keep low, for you may expect a pistol shot in answer to your challenge."

The advancing party was Frank James, Jim Cummins, Jim and Bob Younger.

"Halt!" cried Ben, as they leaped the fence.

The men stopped in a moment, each cocking a pistol.

"Who are you?" asked Ben.

"It's the fellow we are after," said Jim Younger. "He's got the handkerchief off his mouth."

"We are coming for you, my fine fellow; we won't harm you if you don't kick."

"Stop!"

"Why?"

"Surrender!"

The James Boys now realized that they were going right into a trap.

"Fire!" cried Frank.

A rattling crash of pistols answered the command. The bullets knocked out the glass in every direction, and splintered the woodwork about the window where Ben Morgan was.

The stranger returned the fire from his window.

One of the four men fell.

Crack!

Bang! went Ben's revolver and another was wounded.

"An ambuscade!" shouted Jim Younger, seizing his brother Bob, who had fallen, and dragging him from the yard.

Jim Cummins, though slightly wound-

ed, remained at the side of Frank James and fought with all the desperation of a fiend.

Two bullets passed through Frank's hat and one through his coat-sleeve. One grazed his cheek and a ball cut off one of Jim Cummin's boot straps.

They were compelled to fall back.

"It's an ambuscade—an ambuscade!" roared Frank James.

"We won't retreat!"

All were of that opinion, and Frank and Jim Cummins ran on after Jim Younger, who was already some distance down the road, carrying his brother in his arms.

They overtook him, and Frank asked:

"Is Bob killed?"

"No."

"Badly wounded?"

"I dunno, but I believe he is only stunned."

At the spring below the hill they paused for a few moments to wash the blood from Bob's face.

There was a wound along the left side of his head above his ear, where a bullet had cut through to the skull.

"He still breathes," said Jim.

"Then he will live. The wound is not fatal by any means."

Frank James was correct, for Bob Younger soon regained consciousness, and was able to go with them.

"Let us hurry across the log, for if they take it into their heads to follow us, there we will be at a great disadvantage," urged Frank James.

They hurried to the log and crossing over joined Jesse and Cole.

They had heard the firing and were very much alarmed. The wounded man was taken to one of their caverns in the Ozark Mountains, and when morning came, Silas Flynn was found at his house, where he declared he had passed a quiet and peaceful night.

Though Ben Morgan entertained strong suspicions that the scoundrel had had something to do with the abduction of Grace Harvey, no one had any proof, and he was not molested while the sheriff and squads of men were scouring the mountains for the missing girl.

Ben said nothing of his liberator, for that strange personage had requested both himself and Mrs. Harvey to keep his presence a secret.

"Trust in me and I will yet find and rescue the young lady," he declared. "Keep my presence here a profound secret and all will go well."

Though he refused to give his name, Ben knew he was a detective.

It was night. Ben Morgan, worn out with a fruitless day's search among the mountains for the missing girl, was at the hut of a mountaineer to snatch a few hours' sleep, sitting in a chair. He would not go to bed.

"No, I must only wait here a few minutes," he declared, "then I must be going again."

He lay in the large arm rocker, his head resting on a cushion, which the mountaineer's kind-hearted wife insisted in putting under his head.

"Where is she?" Ben asked himself. "Where is Grace? It seems to me that we have searched every nook and corner of the mountains for her, but all in vain. She can't be found."

Tired nature at last sought repose, and he slept.

All about the mountain cottage was very still. The cry of the owl far up the mountain could be heard, and occasionally some fierce, wild animal with which the Ozarks abound. Ben slept on.

Suddenly a face was pressed against the window pane. A few green pine sticks

were burning in the fire-place, and threw out a dim, uncertain flickering light in the room.

The light was sufficient, however, for one to see objects within, and the baleful eyes of the man fell on the sleeping youth. He disappeared.

That face was the face of Jim Cummins.

"This is glorious news," said Jim, with a chuckle. "I could shoot him dead as he sleeps, if Jess wanted it done."

Jim ran up the mountain path for a short distance, and then halting among the scrub oaks, placed a whistle to his lips, and blew three or four sharp blasts, which were not unlike the cry of a night bird peculiar to the mountains.

In a moment it was answered.

"I'll wait," said Jim.

He had not long to wait. Three minutes later a man on horseback rode up to where he stood.

"See the light in the cabin?" Jim whispered.

The silent rider nodded.

"He is in there."

The Midnight Horseman bowed and galloped toward the cabin. He dismounted near it, drew a pistol from his belt, and crept to the cottage.

At the self-same window through which Jim Cummins saw the sleeping man, he also saw him. Jesse James tried the window sash. It was locked down, but that was not an event to worry him long. Drawing his stout knife he pried off the outside slats which held the sash in place, and removed glass, sash and all, without disturbing the sleeper.

"Very cleverly and neatly done," said Jesse, with a chuckle, as he set the sash down upon the ground by the side of the cabin. "Now I have no obstruction."

He climbed into the house through the window, keeping his eyes on the sleeping man and not making noise enough to awake him.

Fortunately for Jesse's plan, the night was so still that not the faintest breeze came through the open window to chill and awake the sleeper. Jesse paused a moment when in the room, his cocked revolver in his hand. Then he stepped to the door and examined the lock.

The door was locked and the key on the inside. Jesse silently and carefully turned the key and said:

"That means of exit is provided for."

Then he went over to the sleeping man, and sitting at his side, gazed at him for a moment and then donned his mask. With the cocked revolver pointed at Ben's heart he touched his shoulder and said in a whisper:

"Wake up, Ben."

"Hello—what is it?"

"Sh! keep silent!" continued Jesse, pressing the muzzle of his revolver against the young man's face.

"What do you want? Have you found her?"

"Yes, but if you don't want to don the robe and play a harp as you soar through the clouds you had better keep a still tongue in your head."

Ben now opened his eyes and saw a large man, wearing a black mask over his face, sitting at his side holding a cocked revolver at his head.

"Excuse me," said the tall, dark stranger, "I am sorry to disturb you."

"Who are you?" Ben asked, coolly, without making an effort to move.

"Call me Valgean."

"Valgean?"

"Yes, Valgean, the Midnight Horseman, or the Silent Rider of the Ozark."

"I have heard of you."

"I supposed you had."



"To what am I indebted for this visit?" Ben coolly asked.

Though he had been taken completely by surprise, he was cool and showed not the least sign of hesitation.

"Don't speak too loud," cautioned the man calling himself Valgeau. "You see I have great respect for these people and don't want to disturb their slumbers."

"You are very considerate," answered Ben, coolly. "I wish you had been as thoughtful on my account, Valgeau."

"I had business with you, Ben."

"What was it?"

"Of a very important nature, I assure you. Now you must come with me, or I will scatter your brains on the floor—something I would regret, as it would soil the carpet."

Ben laid his revolvers on the table at his side when he went to sleep. A glance told him that the pistols were gone, and he was not slow to discover that they had somehow got into Valgeau's pockets.

"Ben, will you come, or do you prefer to die?"

"Come."

"That is right—oh, quite right. Now come on."

Jesse arose to his feet, and Ben did the same. Holding Ben's right arm with his left hand, while the muzzle of his pistol kissed Ben's cheek, he gave the command to march.

They left the house, and were going up the path to where Siroe stood. Already the great black steed was in view, and Ben was asking himself how he would get out of this when the form of a man seemed to suddenly rise right up out of the ground, and leveling a pistol at Jesse's breast, pulled the trigger.

Snap! went the pistol.

Jesse's life had been saved by the pistol missing fire.

He started back to draw his own weapon, when the man struck at him with the butt of his pistol.

Taken by surprise, and off his guard, the outlaw for a moment forgot himself and allowed his prisoner to escape, which Ben quickly availed himself of.

Bang! went Jesse's revolver, but the man who had attacked him struck up the weapon and the ball whistled through the air.

He fired a shot in return, which touched Jesse's cheek, just close enough to leave a mark upon it.

Jesse James sprang at Siroe, and in a moment was in the saddle. This sudden and unexpected attack was too much to resist. Away he flew, while two bullets rang through the air after him.

## CHAPTER VI.

### BEN MORGAN'S FATE.

JESSE James did not draw rein until he was a mile from the scene of the attack, and in the most secluded part of the mountain forest. He dismounted from his trembling steed, and placing a whistle to his lips, blew a blast.

A few moments later Cole Younger, Jim Cummins and Frank James joined him.

"What is the matter, Jess?" asked Cole Younger. "You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"I wish I had," Jesse answered, folding the mask and putting it in his coat pocket. "I would rather see a dozen ghosts than what I have."

"What have you seen, Jesse?"

"Yes, and what was that firing down the mountain?"

"And why have you been running Siroe?"

"One at a time, please," answered Jesse. "I have but one tongue and can only an-

swer one question at a time. One sentence, however, will suffice for all. Carl Greene is in the mountains!"

"What!"

"Impossible!"

"Then our cake's dough!"

Each of Jesse's companions had a remark to make on learning that Carl Greene, the noted detective, who had been the bane of their existence, was again on their trail. The James Boys had good cause to hate and fear Carl Greene. He had proved more than their equal in courage and cunning.

"He is here," said Jesse. "I had the man, Ben Morgan, a prisoner, when he rescued him, and had his pistol not missed fire I would have been in eternity now."

It was decided after a short consultation that they would go to their secret caves in the rocks and wait there for a few days, until Carl Greene had become out of patience and left the country.

Ben Morgan no sooner found himself at liberty than he ran back to the cottage and awoke the mountaineer.

"Have you any pistols?" he asked.

"Yes, but where are your own?" asked the mountaineer.

"They are gone, but I can't explain now. Let me have your arms and go, as I want to capture Valgeau, the Midnight Horseman."

The mountaineer brought him a pair of Colt's navy revolvers, and he asked:

"Are they loaded?"

"Yes."

"Good-night."

"Have a care, Ben; you don't know these mountains as I do."

But Ben did not wait to hear his words of caution. He was hurrying away across the mountains as rapidly as his feet would take him, when a dark form suddenly sprang to his side, a hand was laid on his arm, and a voice said:

"Stop!"

"Who are you?" asked Ben, cocking his pistol.

"Don't you know me? I am your friend."

Ben Morgan now recognized the man who had twice rescued him.

"Where are you going?" the detective asked.

"I am going to kill him."

"Who?"

"Valgeau."

"Is that his *nom-de-plume* now?" asked the detective.

"That is what he calls himself. He is the Midnight Horseman, the Silent Rider of the Ozark."

"Is he?"

"Yes. I believe he had something to do with abducting Grace. In truth, I know it, and I will kill him."

"Have a care."

"It is all very well to caution me now, but I won't while she is a captive."

"This Valgeau, as he calls himself, is an unscrupulous brigand, and he has half a score, if not twice as many followers. Should you fall into their clutches you will undoubtedly be murdered."

"I will run the chances. Let me go."

As Ben Morgan hurried away in the course Jesse James had gone, the detective, who was none other than Carl Greene, muttered:

"A young fellow in love is a fool, and I will have to look after him, or he will come to an untimely end."

It seemed as if Ben's recent capture and escape had well nigh frenzied him. He rushed madly up the mountain along dangerous paths, where a single misstep would plunge him down a thousand feet to certain destruction.

He was preserved by that blind destiny which seems to ever care for the reckless.

He trod paths that night and penetrated dark recesses which, under ordinary circumstances, would have been impossible.

In this blind, blundering way he stumbled into one of the secret dens of the James Boys in the mountains. In very madness he tore away the vines which hid the grotto, and bolted right into their midst ere he was aware of what he was about. There were four men in the grotto, one of whom had his head bandaged.

"Surrender!" he roared, leveling his revolvers at them.

The very boldness of the scheme would have proven a success with any other men, but it would not work with those bandits.

"Fool!" cried Jim Younger.

He seized an iron bar and struck up the pistols.

Crack!

Crack!

Both shots struck the stone ceiling.

Whack! came the iron bar on the side of Ben's head, and down went the young man as if he had been shot.

"Well, did ever any one hear of the impudence?" cried Jim Younger.

"No," Cummins answered.

"Is he dead?" asked Frank.

"No—I suppose not."

"Look out, boys! There may be more."

"What will we do with him?"

"Tie him fast."

By the time this was accomplished Ben Morgan, who was only slightly stunned, began to show signs of recovering. He was soon himself again, and realizing his situation kept silent, while his enemies debated on what they would do with him.

"We must leave. We may have half a hundred on us before long."

They took up the prisoner and half carried and half dragged him up a steep and thorny path for a mile, when they halted and held a whispered conversation. The outlaws were pursued and in great distress. Two were left with Ben, who was tied hand and foot, on the edge of a precipice. Below he could hear the wild roar of angry waters. Two went away to reconnoiter.

"If there is danger," said one, "we will give the signal whistle. Then you must push him over the bluff and run."

"We will."

It seemed ages to poor Ben that he lay there, expecting death at every moment. Then a shot rang out from below, the awful whistle rang on the air, and one of his guards said:

"Over with him!"

He was pushed over the bluff and fell down—down toward those raging waters, hundreds of feet below.

## CHAPTER VII.

### OLD HARDTACK.

"How do you feel?"

These were the words which came in Ben's ears.

He looked up and saw the detective bending over him. He tried to speak but could not. He felt no pain, yet his nervous system had received a great shock, and he was so weak he could not raise a finger at first.

"Don't try to speak," said Carl Greene, the detective. "You had better be quiet now."

"No—I can speak," he said, after a second effort.

"Well, don't try."

"But I will."

"It may injure you."

"What has happened?" Ben Morgan asked, in his bewildered sort of a way. "Something terrible has happened, I know, but I can't think what it is."

"Don't try."



"But I can't help trying."

"Then I suppose I had better tell you."

"Do, for it all seems a blank. Why, I don't know who I am, nor what I was."

"You are Ben Morgan."

"Ah, yes—clerk in Hackett's store, at the foot of the mountain."

"Just so."

"I know now! Grace Harvey was carried away. I was trying to find her—ran into the stronghold of the bandits and was captured."

"I suppose so."

"I was left tied on the bluff with two, while two more went away to reconnoiter, and then I heard a shot."

"So did I."

"And the danger signal."

"I heard the same."

"I was hurled over the bluff and I don't know any more."

"I do."

"What?"

"I saved you."

"How?"

"I overheard the villain's instructions to hurl you over. I knew that some men from the village were coming up that very mountain path, and that you would be dashed to death over the precipice, and I resolved to save you, and I did."

"How?"

"I know these mountains better than they do. I knew that just below the bluff on which you lay was a projecting ledge. I climbed down to that ledge and with some ropes tied myself to a point of rock so I could not fall off, and as you were tumbled over I caught you in my arms. Of course you had fainted—who wouldn't?"

"When did that happen?"

"Last night."

"What time is it now?"

"The middle of the afternoon."

Then Ben Morgan for the first time discovered that he was in a cabin.

It was one of those mountain cabins which seem to seek seclusion in the deepest shades of the woods, and the poor mountaineer who lived there willingly let the detective have the use of it.

"Who are you?" asked Ben.

"Could you keep a secret if I told you?"

"Yes."

"Your own success and the safety of Grace Harvey depends on your keeping my name a profound secret."

"I will—I swear I will."

He stooped and whispered in his ear:

"Carl Greene."

Ben Morgan started back and stared at the man in wonder and amazement. Could this be the famous man of whom he had heard so much?

It was several moments before Ben was able to speak. Then all he could say was:

"Carl Greene—Carl Greene!"

"Yes."

"Can it be possible that you are Carl Greene?"

"I am," and the detective smiled.

Still gazing at him as if he almost doubted the assertion, Ben Morgan went on, half in dreamy reverie:

"Can it be possible that I see before me the wonderful man, Carl Greene, about whom the papers have had so much to say? The man of whom romances are written, who has been represented on the stage, of whom the poets sing, as if he was a creation of their own genius? I have heard so much of Carl Greene that I had almost concluded he must be a creation of fancy."

The detective with a smile returned:

"He is not a creature of fancy, but of real flesh and blood."

"I am so glad you are here."

"Why?"

"Now he will be safe."

"Grace Harvey?"

"Yes."

"Put not too much confidence in me," said the detective. "Sometimes even the best men fail."

"But you will not. You are better than the best, and if Carl Greene has set to work to rescue Grace Harvey she will be rescued."

The detective told him he must go away for a while.

"Let me go with you."

"No, stay here until I return."

"I can't."

"You must."

"But I will die if I remain here."

Then the detective gave him a soothing draught from a bottle and hurried away.

"I will return by the time you have had your nap out."

"I wonder where he is going and what he is about?" said Ben Morgan.

His eyes began to grow heavy, and a deep sleep came over him.

The draught administered was not a narcotic, but something calculated to soothe the nerves of the exhausted man, and he slept sweetly on.

He was awakened at last by hearing voices in the cabin.

He opened his eyes. It was night now, and the mountain air being cool a great fire of blazing logs sparkled on the hearth.

Before the fire sat two men; one was past fifty with short, grizzled beard, and hair almost white. He held a rifle across his knees as he sat in a chair.

His companion was a young fellow with a sickly looking mustache, which he had long since given up the hope of curling.

He was armed like his companion with a gun and a brace of pistols.

"Right ye air, comrade," said the old man. "I wish I may be mustered out o' ther service with er dishonorable discharge ef et ain't so. This 'ere Valgean, ther Midnight Hossman, air up ter some mischief."

"What is it, Hardtack?"

"Now yer a-shoutiu', comrade. Ax me suthin' kinder easy like an' I'll answer yer."

"Hardtack—wot did he carry off the gal for?"

"Yer got me agin, comrade," and old Hardtack shifted the huge quid of tobacco in his mouth from one cheek to the other.

Ben Morgan was now wide enough awake to raise himself on his elbow and gaze at the two men.

"They are Hardtack and Cock Robin from Hackett's," he said.

"Guess they purty nigh done Ben up," said Cock Robin.

"Guess they did."

"Wall, old Hardtack, thar ain't any manner o' doubt in my mind 'bout that."

"Said they tumbled him over the bluff."

"Couldn't."

"Why?"

"It'd a-killed him."

"But he did not fall all ther way down."

"What stopped him?"

"I heerd a feller eotched him."

At this moment Ben raised up in the bed and said:

"Hello!"

"What—Ben?"

"Alive, by Jimany!"

"Yes, alive and well."

Ben sprang from the bed and began to dress.

Old Hardtack bounded to his feet and began to dance.

"Hip-hooray—Ben's alive! Now ain't that er daisy—good luek!" cried the old veteran.

"Ben!"

"What will you have, Cock Robin?"

"Who is he?"

"Who?"

"This Midnight Horseman?"

"He is none other than Jesse James, the highwayman."

"What?"

Both Cock Robin and old Hardtack were on their feet.

"Now may I be chawed up for er fried rattlesnake, ef I don't make et erbout ther liveliest time that's ever been erbout here," cried the old man.

"Wot'll ye do, Hardtack?"

"I'll knock the socks off er that pilgrim, comrade. Let me ever get er bead on him with old Sweetlove an' he's a goner," and the old veteran patted his long-barreled, old-fashioned rifle affectionately.

"Hardtack, ye'd better look er little out."

"Me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"This feller is er dead shot, and he may git ther drop on ye."

"Now, when he does let him whistle, he'll think he's got a Jonah's gourd. I belonged ter ther Thirteenth Missouri, er regiment wot never war whipped."

"But he was one of Quantrell's band."

"I don't fear any man wot rides the mountains ur walks ther valleys. I am er reg'lar lined, striped hyena, er walkin' terror. I have seventeen rattles an' er button, an' ef they want any fun let 'em tread on my tail."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" rang out a wild laugh from the window.

All eyes were turned in that direction, and a dark man, with a black mask over his face, was seen sitting on a horse black as midnight. In one hand he held a well-made silver-mounted pistol, and in the other the rein of his bridle.

This sudden apparition had the effect to appall everybody.

For a moment no one was able to speak or move. Cock Robin was first to regain his voice. He cried:

"It's the Midnight Horseman!"

"Jesse James!" shouted Ben Morgan.

"You are wrong," answered the man from the window.

"I don't keer one continental who yer air!" roared Hardtack; "yer not goin' ter bulldoze me in any sich er way as this!"

He cocked his rifle, but before he could bring it to his shoulder the face had disappeared from the window.

"Hold on—I'll have him yit!"

Then Hardtack, with fury in his eyes, rushed from the cabin.

The cabin was built on a sort of bench or plateau on the mountain side. This plateau was several acres in extent, and covered mostly with large trees.

He saw a man flying before him on a black horse.

"Halt thar! Advance and give ther countersign!" roared old Hardtack, running after him.

The fugitive kept steadily on.

"Halt!"

Still no answer.

"I only call halt three times an' then accordin' ter all rules o' war I've got er right ter shoot," yelled old Hardtack.

But the man kept on.

"Halt!"

Crack!

The sharp crack of the rifle rang out on the mountain air, and the bullet went whizzing on its course.

But it failed to bring down the daring horseman. Raising himself in his stirrups he swung his hat above his head and yelled:

"Come on, you old fool, with seventeen rattles and a button. I'll tread on your



tail and lead you a merry chase. Come on—come on!"

"I'll come now. Don't yer go an' faint from fear. I won't bring on the reserves," roared old Hardtack.

"You had better load that old popgun."

"I'll bust yer head in with the butt o' it if I git close ter yer."

"Oh, don't!"

"Say, hold on thar. Ef yer love me please stop an' fight," howled old Hardtack, with tears in his eyes. "I wouldn't play ther mean part o' a coward in this way. Halt! Stop! Chaw my ear, slap me in the face, won't yer, an' let's hev ther thing out."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha! You old fool, I could kill you if I wanted to do so!" the masked horseman cried, as he galloped leisurely along before the enraged man.

"Why don't yer do it?"

"Because you are too amusing. I would not dare hurt a man who causes me as much fun as you do."

"Do stop."

Jesse James roared with laughter. At this moment Siroc leaped a tree which had fallen across the road and disappeared. He disappeared as completely from view as if he vanished into air.

Hardtack hated to give him up, but he had to do so.

He was panting for breath.

The moon rose, lit all the mountain with a flood of silver glory, and shone on the bald head of the old man as he sat on a stone fanning his heated face with his hat.

"Well, ther gee-whiz! if that ain't ther hardest tussle I've had in a long time!" gasped old Hardtack, panting for breath.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

##### JESSE AND COCK ROBIN.

HARDTACK was not the only person in pursuit of the Silent Rider of the Ozark.

Ben Morgan and Cock Robin each started in pursuit.

Cock Robin's legs were shorter than old Hardtack's, and Ben Morgan was too weak to keep it up even with Cock Robin.

"Stop, Ben, don't yer try ter foller," said Alread or Cock Robin.

"I will."

"Yer can't keep up."

"Where is Hardtack now?"

"Out o' sight."

"Cock Robin, let us separate," suggested Ben.

"Why?"

"There are different mountain paths, and by taking different paths we will some of us be sure to run on him."

"Yes, yer bet."

"Take the path right of the one followed by Hardtack, and I will go to the left."

Ben Morgan did not wait to see whether Cock Robin obeyed him or not. He went flying up the path he had chosen for himself, looking to intercept the bandit and meet him face to face.

Ben Morgan had only one revolver and no gun.

He was ill-prepared for a combat with Jesse James, yet he determined to find him and fight Jesse or the entire band is necessary.

Cock Robin followed the path which Ben Morgan had asked him to take, and ran at a headlong speed for an hour.

He halted on a ledge of rock, and leaning on his gun, panting from exertion, said:

"By gosh, this beats the Dutch! Here I've been er chasin' that feller wot I believe is er shadder all over creashun."

He sat down, and taking off his hat began to fan his heated face.

"Hello, Cock Robin!" called a strange, mysterious voice.

Alread was on his feet in a moment.

He looked to the right and left, up and down the mountain, but could see nobody.

"Guess I war mistaken," he said, seating himself once more on the stone.

"Hello, Cock Robin!"

This time the voice spoke louder, and in a tone that drove away all possibility of a mistake.

Alread looked all about him again but could see no one.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" came a hoarse laugh.

"Well, whar air yer?" demanded Cock Robin.

"Here."

The voice this time seemed to come from the air above him.

"Where?"

"Here."

"I swar it's berlow me."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Again that demoniacal laugh rang out on the night air.

Cock Robin, who was not entirely free from superstition, began to shudder and tremble in his boots.

"Great goodness! Et air a ghost," he said.

"Oh, no, Cock Robin, I am no ghost, but I might make one of you."

He now looked across a mountain chasm, and saw a man sitting on a point of projecting rock.

He wore a black mask on his face, and behind some bushes could be seen the dark outline of a horse.

"It's ther Midnight Horseman!" gasped Cock Robin.

"Well, you see me now, don't you?" he asked.

"Yer bet I do."

"Come over!"

"No, you come over here!"

"I am tied."

The cool, daring impudence of the fellow roused the anger of Cock Robin, and he cried:

"Say, blast me ef I don't kill yer!"

"Oh, no."

"Yes, I will."

Cock Robin seized his gun, but ere he could cock it, the man on the projecting rock had disappeared.

"Gone!"

Cock Robin looked to the right and left, but could see nothing of the man who had but a moment before been in plain view.

"Gosh! guess I hed better be gittin' out o' this."

But Cock Robin was no coward, and he disliked very much to go back and say that he had been outwitted by this strange horseman.

He went down the mountain path for a short distance, and then came to a halt.

"Blamed ef I'll do it!" he cried. "Why do I want ter go back an' be called er coward? No, blast et—I'll jist lay around hyar an' wait till I kin git er chance, an' then I'll bring him down."

He scrambled up a stony embankment, and parting the young pines with his hand, came to the chasm a little lower down.

"Now, how is er feller ter git across?" he asked himself. After a few moments' reflection he saw that the chasm was narrower a little farther up the mountain. He hurried toward the narrowest part and saw a log lying across the chasm.

"Ber gosh! looks ez if et had been laid thar a-purpose," said Cock Robin.

He crossed the chasm and hurried up a rocky slope until he was lost among the woods and bushes.

Suddenly he heard a voice. It was like the snort of a horse.

"Helloa! wot's that?"

He stopped and listened.

Crouching down upon one knee he cocked his gun and waited.

There was a few moments' silence, during which Alread's heart gave great thumps.

Cock Robin had long been a mountaineer and hunter, and was a good shot even at night. He had a keen eye and ear. Lying down upon the ground he listened for some sound which might indicate where the enemy was.

A very slight rustling was heard in the bushes a short distance ahead of him. With cocked rifle he crept forward ten paces further, and crouching waited and listened.

"Oho! I will have you yet, ye sweet-scented dandy o' ther woods."

There was another long pause, which, to the anxious Cock Robin, seemed an age. It was ended at last by the falling of a pebble near him.

He started, wheeled about to face the direction from whence the new danger was threatened, and the barrel of his gun caught among the branches of a tree near and it was discharged.

The stunning report had scarce ceased to reverberate on the air, when he was seized from behind.

"Well done, my fine fellow."

"Oh, gosh! let go o' me."

"Easy, Cock Robin."

"Who air ye?"

"Valgean."

"Gosh! it's ther Midnight Hossman."

"Yes."

"Wall, s'pose yer want my choice, d'yer?"

"Choice?"

"Yes."

"What choice?"

"Jist how I want ter die."

"Oh, we will talk of that after a while."

"Wall say, pilgrim, I want yer ter make the neatest job out o' this wot ye've ever made yit."

"What do you mean?"

"When yer kill me do it up in er hurry. Don't make any bunglin' business."

"Oh, nonsense; I am not going to kill you."

"I ain't afeered to die."

"Who said you were?"

"Wall, hurry up; I want this 'ere thing over with, kinder quick like, yer know."

"Well, let us to business," said Jesse, laughing, though at the same time he could not but admire the fellow's boldness and coolness.

"Come with me."

"Whar?"

"For a moonlight stroll."

Cock Robin glanced up at the stars and said:

"Guess I'll soon be ermong 'em."

Jesse James shook with laughter. He conducted his prisoner to the banks of a mountain cataract, where they sat down on the mossy banks of the stream in the full light of the moon.

"Now, pilgrim, hurry up with yer work."

"My work?"

"Yes."

"Very well. I have brought you out here to talk with you."

"Have yer? Wall, I don't know nothin' ter talk erbout. Ef yer want somebody ez kin talk ter yer git ole Miss Darrell. She kin talk an' talk an' talk forever!"

"Do you work for old Jerry Hackett?" Jesse asked.

"Yes."

"What do you do?"

"I cut logs for his mill."

"Does he pay you?"

"Yes."

"In money or notes?"

"Hard cash."

"How often?"



"Every Saturday night."

"How many hands does he pay off every Saturday night?"

"Don' know—'bout fifty, I suspect. Thar's er hull mint o' 'em anyway."

"Yes—I suppose so."

"Now, what yer want ter know all them queshuns for?"

"Do you suppose I could get a job there?"

Cock Robin was not so dull as to think Jesse was in earnest.

"I say; I expect yer could git er job in Jefferson City."

"Oh, do you?"

"Yes."

"You are witty."

"D'yer think so?"

"Yes. Now, Cock Robin, do you know Ben Morgan?"

"Yes."

"Did you know Joe Young?"

"Yes; he's dead, though."

"Of course. Was he frequently at Hackett's store?"

"Came there sometimes."

"Left his papers in Hackett's safe?"

"Believe he did."

"Very well. Now——"

Crack!

Sharp and keen rang out the report of a rifle.

Jesse James felt a hot, stinging pain on his forehead, as if a hot iron had suddenly been drawn across it.

He put his hand instinctively to his face and it was covered with blood.

Jesse was stunned, but not disabled. In a second he leaped to his feet and sprang into the bushes, leaving Cock Robin tied on the ground.

"Ber gosh! how am I ter git these blasted ropes off'n my wrist?" cried the captive.

The blood kept streaming in Jesse's face and blinding him.

Once he got sight of old Hardtack, the man who had fired at him, he raised his revolver to fire at him, but a rush of blood over his eyes so blinded him that he could not shoot.

Jesse was in no condition to fight the old veteran, so he stole away into the woods to bind up his wounds.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE SILENT RIDER.

COCK ROBIN sat on the ground where Jesse had left him, expecting every moment to be killed.

"Now, I wonder who fired that air shot, an' I wonder why that air feller skipped out so sudden?" he said, to himself.

When Jesse James retreated into the bushes Siroe, alarmed at the shot, plunged into the thicket after his master.

The noble animal seemed to instinctively feel that something was wrong with his master.

"What'n ther déuce do all this mean?" Cock Robin Alread asked, trying hard to slip his hands from the knotted cord which bound them.

Suddenly he heard a tread in the bushes near, then a whisper:

"Cock Robin!"

"Wall?"

"Whist!"

Another step. Then a pause, followed by a sound very much like some one ramming a bullet down into a rifle.

"Why don't yer do suthin'?" growled Cock Robin, growing impatient. "I'd ten times rather ye'd kill me and be done with it than ter keep er feller er waitin' an' er waitin' hyar fur yer ter do suthin'."

"Be patient, comrade. Wait till I get my lues dressed, eyes front, march right

up ter yer an' liberate you. We arc on the skirmish line now."

He paused at Alread's side, and in a moment had him liberated.

"Who did this?" asked Hardtack.

"Dun know! He called hisself Valgean, the Midnight Rider."

Cock Robin being liberated rose to his feet.

"Whar's yer gun?"

"He tuk it."

"What did he do with it?"

"Dun know."

"Yer pistols?"

"Tuk 'em too."

A very little search showed them the gun broken against a tree.

Jesse James had learned during the war to allow no weapons to be left behind him. He broke the rifle and threw the pistols into the mountain torrent.

"Hardtack, guess I'm left out."

"Hyar's a pistol," said the old soldier, and he handed a weapon to the young man.

"Now, all I want is ter see that air feller called Valgean, an', by erimany cracky, he's er dead man!"

As they were hastening down a mountain path hoping to come upon the wounded highwayman, they suddenly heard a footstep.

"Stop, Cock Robin Alread."

"It's him!"

Alread cocked his pistols. A dark form could be seen slowly ascending the hill.

Cock Robin leveled his pistol at the dark object and took a deliberate aim.

"Hold on, don't fire!" whispered old Hardtack. "Let us send er force ter reconnoiter an' see ef it ain't friends."

"Don't berlieve in yer blamed military nonsense," growled Cock Robin.

"Wait hyar."

With all the skill of an experienced army scout Old Hardtack crept forward to the spot where the dark object was seen.

"Ben, air et you?"

"Yes—who fired that shot?"

"I did."

"At whom?"

"Ther Midnight Hossman."

Ben explained that he had become exhausted and paused to rest when he heard the shot, and then he hastened to find out the origin of it.

"It is he," said Ben. "What became of him?"

"He skipped out like he had been teched with er hot griddle."

"Did he? Maybe you hit him?"

"There was blood on the ground."

"Jesse James wounded!" thought Ben Morgan. "Let us search for him."

The three set out to scour this part of the mountain on which they were, and not finding any one they decided that the silent rider had gone away to some other part of the Ozarks.

"Let us go back," said Cock Robin.

"Where?" Ben asked.

"Down ther mountin ter Hackett's. This mountin air ain't good fur my health!" old Hardtack exclaimed.

"Wall, it wouldn't be good fur that air feller's health nuther ef I could jist git another crack at him. Hurray fur ther old Thirteenth Missouri, I say!"

"So say I," put in Alread, "ef ye kin bring down that seamp."

"He is not here—that fact is quite evident," said Ben Morgan. "Now let us go to some other point where we will find him."

They hurried down the mountain side, and Ben Morgan was asking himself what had become of Carl Greene, the detective.

"I went to sleep and left him in the house," he thought. "He was to come back to me soon, but he did not. Can it be he was killed?"

Having been enjoined by Carl Greene himself to keep his presence a secret, Ben Morgan determined not to mention his name even to his companions. But they might know something of him."

"Hardtack, did you see anything of the man who brought me to the mountain cabin?"

"No, who was he?"

"I—I—I don't know."

"One o' them?"

"Who?"

"One o' the fellers wot belongs ter these midnight riders."

"No."

"How d'ye know?"

"I know full well. He saved me from them."

"Whar is he from?"

"Don't know," Ben answered. "He is a stranger."

"A stranger? Wall, now, I am mighty suspicious o' strangers, I am."

They had reached a portion of the country which was grand and picturesque in the extreme.

On the north the Ozark Mountain pierced the skies, and its hoary head was lost in the soft, blue, vapory-like cloud which seemed to have caught on the peak. The shreds of a passing cloud had caught there.

There was a plateau or bluff coming out from the side of the mountain.

At the foot of this bluff was a deep gorge which it would be impossible to cross, unless one was able to fly. The moon shone almost bright as day.

Suddenly Cock Robin cried:

"Look ye thar!" and pointed toward the bluff.

All eyes were turned in that direction, and Jesse James, mounted on his gallant steed, Siroe, was seen to ride out upon the bluff and raise his hat.

"Now may I disgrace ther old Thirteenth, er regiment that never war whipped, ef I don't empty thet saddle," cried old Hardtack, raising his gun. But at this moment a man was seen to leap from behind a stone on the bluff and seize Jesse's horse by the bit.

"Hold!" cried Ben. "Don't shoot."

He had recognized the man who had seized Jesse's horse as Carl Greene.

## CHAPTER X.

### A FEW SHOTS AT MIDNIGHT.

"LET go o' my gun," said Hardtack.

"Don't fire."

"Why?"

"You may hit the wrong man."

"Who is he?"

"Never mind."

Ben Morgan had the name Carl Greene almost on his tongue's end, but he restrained himself.

Old Hardtack lowered his gun, and they watched the scene on the bluff.

It was the most thrilling scene ever enacted on or off the stage.

The detective seized the bits of the horse with his left hand, and leveled a revolver at the rider with his right hand.

From where they were, Ben Morgan almost fancied he could hear the daring detective command the horseman to surrender.

Jesse James threw himself as far over on the right side of his horse as possible, to be out of range of the revolver, and then touched the flank of Siroe with his spur. Siroe bounded forward and Jesse reined him in so near to the bluff that the toes of the shoes on the horse's front feet were over the edge of the bluff.

Now came the most thrilling scene in the drama.

Jesse James knew full well that Carl



Greene would cling like grim death to the rein of his steed.

The animal reared into the air and actually swung the daring detective out over the gorge and tried to shake him off.

Had the bridle rein broken or had his hold slipped he would have been plunged into the rocky gorge and dashed to pieces.

But he clung with his left hand to the bit, and with his right fired two shots at Jesse as he swung in the air. But the Midnight Horseman kept himself out of the range of the daring detective's pistol.

Such a scene could not last long. Carl Green's toe touched the bluff, and by a tremendous effort he threw himself forward. The detective fell on his face on the ground, and Siroc struck twice at him with his fore feet, and wheeling kicked with his hind foot. The sharp steel toe grazed Carl Greene's head.

Jesse James who had all through the thrilling scene maintained his seat in the saddle, fired two shots at the dark mass lying on the ground, but both shots missed their mark.

The bullet struck the ground so near to him that the dust and earth rose in his face.

"Now, Hardtack, is your chance!" cried Ben Morgan.

"Wall, may I be dishonorably mustered out if I don't pluck a hole right squar through his rare rank!" cried the soldier, leveling his rifle at the back of the horseman.

But the thrilling scene which he had witnessed had its effect on the old man's nerves. No one could have gazed on that scene without being more or less effected by it. The veteran for the first time in his life found himself trembling, and when the sharp report of his rifle broke on the air, the bullet went two or three inches to the left of Jesse James.

The bandit king of America now realized that he had no time to waste, consequently he gave Siroc the rein and away he flew.

At half a dozen bounds he was beyond range of the guns of the men from Hackett's.

"Carl Greene?" Jesse gasped. "He is here beyond question. Well, if he is to meet us at every turn our plans will not be carried out so easily after all."

He had gone about two miles when he had suddenly placed a whistle to his mouth and blew a shrill blast.

The signal was answered in the wood at no great distance away.

"Woa, Siroc!"

Siroc came to a standstill in a moment. The wild cry of a night owl rang out on the air.

"The boys are coming?" remarked the silent rider.

He was correct, for a few moments later three mounted men rode from a cluster of bushes on the mountain side in single file.

"Jesse!" said the foremost of them.

"Well, Frank?"

"You called us?"

"I did. Who have you with you?"

"Jim and Wood Hite."

Jim Cummins was nearly always with the James Boys, on their most desperate adventures he was with them, and the James Brothers were not more true to each other than was he to them.

"What has gone amiss, Jesse?" Jim Cummins asked.

"Some bullets."

"Did you have a fight?"

"Yes."

"With whom?"

"Carl Greene was one."

"Carl Greene—is that detective here?"

"Yes."

"Then our cake's dough!" growled Wood Hite.

"No, don't say that," said Jim Cummins, who took a more hopeful view of the situation. "We have all had some dealings with him, and we are neither in the penitentiary nor hung!"

"That is so."

Jesse James now related his adventure in full with Carl Greene, and the men on the other side of the chasm.

"You don't know whether you shot him or not then, Jesse?"

"No, but I fired twice at him, and did my best to kill him."

"Why didn't you dismount and go and blow his brains out?"

"I could not with those fellows on the other side blazing away at me. From the nearness with which their bullets sang to my ears, I am quite certain they are not poor shots."

"Well, Jesse, do you propose to give it up?" asked Frank.

"Give what up?"

"This business that brings us into the country."

"No."

"But Carl Greene?"

"Boys," interrupted Jesse, solemnly, "we will kill Carl Greene. Bear that in mind. It is now a war to the death. We must put that detective under the sod if it takes every man of our gallant band to do it."

"Yes, we will do it!" cried Jim Cummins.

"Where is Flynn?" asked Jesse.

"He is coming up the path with Ed Mc-Millan."

Even as they spoke of the two, they came along the mountain path on foot.

Silas Flynn was trembling with eagerness and hate. His fate was so intimately interwoven with the James Boys that he was compelled to rise or fall with them.

"What has happened?" asked Silas.

"Surely nothing bad has happened. Don't tell me that she has escaped."

"Of whom are you talking?" Jesse James asked.

"Of Grace Harvey, to be sure. Who else am I talking about? If she escapes then I can't make her marry me, and if we don't marry my uncle's will cuts me out."

"It was a foolish will," said Jesse James, dismounting and rubbing Siroc's trembling flanks.

"Oh, yes—very!"

"The man who made it must have been mad."

"Do you really think the plea of insanity could be set up against it? But, no, it would be so much easier to destroy the will. The girl might go then. I don't care a fig for her if she did not bring a cool million with her."

"That is a considerable sum," Jesse James remarked, rubbing the sides of his horse.

"Oh, yes; indeed it is quite a sum," cried Silas. "But where is the girl?"

"Safe."

"She did not escape?"

"No."

"And you will keep her safe?"

"If we can."

"Surely you don't think they can find her?"

"I don't know what point of these mountain regions the gimlet eyes of these mountaineers may not reach. I would advise you to go to your home and stay there until morning, anyway."

"Oh, thank you, I will take you at your word. Now, adieu, until I see you again."

And with a profound bow Mr. Silas Flynn was gone. Jesse James gazed after the racial for several moments in silence, and then, turning to his companions, said:

"Boys, I believe there are greater vil-

lains in this world than robbers. There goes one now."

"You are right, Jess," answered Jim Cummins. "He is such a scoundrel that I cannot fellowship with him."

"I think, boys, now that we are here," said Jesse, reflectively, "that it would not be a bad plan for us to go down the mountain side toward the store."

"I am agreed to that," put in Jim Cummins. "Anything you say, Jesse, we will obey."

"Then come on!"

Jesse James sprang into the saddle. Some of his followers were mounted and some on foot.

Along the rugged mountain path, sometimes ascending, but more often descending, the James Boys wound their course, until at last they were near the plateau on which Jesse James had so recently encountered the detective, Carl Greene.

"It was here I met him, boys," said Jesse. "Now look sharp, for he is somewhere near, you can depend on it. I will wager my head that Carl Greene turns up again inside of twelve hours."

"Where were those other fellows?" asked Frank. "You spoke of there being more."

"Yes—they were across that chasm."

"I don't see them now."

"Let us go down the creek," said Jesse.

The banditti went slowly along a winding mountain cascade.

There is no scenery more wild and picturesque than the wonderful Ozarks, whose peaks seem to pierce the skies. They reached a point where the roaring cascade dashed right down before them, and the moon suddenly burst forth from behind a cloud, lighting up the whole scene as light as day.

Suddenly a voice cried on the other side of the stream:

"There they are!"

"Where?"

"Right across the gorge."

Jesse James and his companions halted.

It was now midnight, but the moon riding high in the heavens, flooded all the scene with a light almost as brilliant as day.

On the opposite side of the stream, not over a hundred and fifty paces from them, were half a dozen men armed with guns and pistols.

"Look out, boys," cautioned Jesse James. "We are going to have a fight."

Crack! went a rifle.

A bullet whizzed through the air.

Jesse returned the shot, but owing to Siroc shying a little, missed.

The party whom the James boys discovered across the stream were Ben Morgan and Hardtack, Cook Robin Alread, and Mr. Jerry Hackett, his son Tom and Flatfoot Jim Toney.

Three of the party had guns, the others were armed only with revolvers, and in that respect no better off than the James Boys. Old Hardtack had fired, but at the moment he pulled the trigger some one jostled against his side, and he missed.

"Confound it!" cried Hardtack, as he began to reload. "I'll plug that air feller now, or yer may take me for er liar every time I speak."

Flatfoot Jim blazed away with his old musket, but, as usual, missed. Nobody ever expected him to hit an object even as large as the side of a barn. But old Hardtack was another person entirely. Frank James knew he was a sure shot, and he called:

"Jesse, Jesse, dismount!"

All of them had taken the precaution to slip from the saddle save Jesse James.

"Dismount Jesse!" cried Jim Cummins.



"Why?" asked Jesse, who was trying to get a shot at someone on the other side.

"You are too good a mark up there on your horse."

"But I want to kill him."

"Who?"

"That old man with the long gun; I will floor him if I get a fair shot."

But Old Hardtack had taken the precaution to screen himself behind a tree.

"Come down, Jesse, it's foolish to risk your life that way," Wood Hite declared, and Jesse sprang from the saddle and led Siroc back behind some stones out of range of the bullets, for Jesse James thought almost as much of his horse as he did of himself.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A TERRIBLE ADVENTURE.

THE James Boys ensconced behind stone and trees, prepared to open the conflict.

They were near enough to each other to render mutual aid when it became necessary.

Suddenly Jim Cummins called.

"Ed McMillan! Ed McMillan!"

He spoke in a low tone so he could not be heard a great distance.

"Well," Ed answered.

"Didn't you kill that fellow, Ben Morgan?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"I am."

"How did you do it?"

"Rolled him over a bluff some two or three hundred feet into a mountain torrent."

"Do you think that would kill him?"

"If it wouldn't what would?"

"I don't know. But he is not dead."

"Oh, you are crazy, Jim!"

"No. He is across the stream there shooting at us."

The James Boys were not aware that Carl Greene had rescued Ben Morgan the moment he was thrown over the cliff.

It was some time before they could be made to believe that he was living, but after awhile Jesse James himself got a glance at Ben, and recognized him. He tried to put a bullet in his face, but was not quite quick enough.

"There is no mistake about it boys," said Jesse. "The fellow is Ben Morgan."

After twenty-five or thirty shots had been exchanged and as yet no one hurt, the firing on the opposite side of the stream ceased. They waited for some time when Jesse expressed it as his opinion that the mountineers had gone down or up the stream intending to cross over and attack them on their flank. They had no notion of being caught in any such a way and retreated.

"Well, what shall we do now?" asked Jim Cummins, when they halted in a small glade.

Jesse James glanced at the moon, and taking out his watch, he glanced at its face.

"Threc," he said. "How the time does fly! You boys can go to the big cave."

"Where are you going, Jesse?"

"I have some matters that I must attend to alone."

Jesse suddenly dismounted, and giving the rein of his horse to his brother, said:

"Here, Frank, take Siroc with you."

Had a shell suddenly exploded at the feet of Frank James he could not have been more amazed. Glaring at his brother with eyes which seemed almost starting from their sockets, he asked:

"Jesse, what does this mean?"

"I am going on foot."

"On foot?"

Every one cried:

"On foot!"

It was something new under the sun for Jesse James to part with Siroc. The highwayman had so long been accustomed to the saddle, that no one would have thought he would risk himself a moment away from Siroc.

Besides Siroc was more than a steed. He was a companion. He had crushed more than one skull with his iron-shod hoofs, and more than once he had saved Jesse's life.

"Yes, boys, where I am going now, a horse would be an incumbrance. A horse, even Siroc, can't climb a tree, nor can he scale a perpendicular cliff. Take him, Frank."

The banditti started up the road.

Suddenly Jim stopped.

"Jesse," said the highwayman.

"What, Jim?"

"Are you going alone?"

"Certainly."

"Won't you let me go with you?"

"No."

"Why?"

"In this matter I can do best alone."

Jim Cummins heaved a sigh and asked:

"Have you counted the danger?"

"Certainly."

"I wish you would let me go."

"I can't. You are a brave, noble fellow, Jim, but in this matter you must let me have my way."

"But, Jesse, when can we expect you?"

"Where?"

"At the cavern."

Jesse reflected a moment, and answered:

"Noon, day after to-morrow."

"Not before?"

"No."

"What are we to do meanwhile?"

"Well, lie close, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you have a good opportunity to blow out the brains of Carl Greene. Don't let any chance to kill him slip."

"I won't."

"Caution all the other boys to do the same thing."

"I will."

"Now go, or you will be left behind."

Jim breathed a low:

"Farewell!" and was gone.

The Midnight Horseman ran above and dismounted in the mountain wilds, sat down upon a large stone, and taking out his pistols, examined them.

One of the chambers of his pistols was empty, and Jesse hastened to put in a fresh cartridge.

"Now to go to that old mill or house, whatever it is, on the bluff, which I saw yesterday."

Jesse rose and went slowly down the path.

He had hardly got out of sight, when a dark form slowly and carefully wriggled itself out from the tall grass and bushes near by. A pair of keen eyes glared after Jesse.

Then the man silently crawled from his hiding-place. He was a very cool man, for he did everything deliberately and seemed not the least bit excited.

He glanced in the direction Jesse James had gone one moment, and the next he turned his eyes in the opposite direction taken by the highwayman's band.

This person was Carl Greene the detective.

Carl Greene slowly wended his way along the path taken by the highwayman chief, and followed him for half a mile, but did not come within sight of him. Suddenly the prince of detectives threw himself on the ground.

At that instant there issued from behind a small clump of bushes the bright flash of

a pistol, and a bullet hummed through the air. Jesse James had not been deceived. He knew some one was shadowing him, and laid behind a stone to kill him.

Carl Greene fully realized his danger. Jesse James would not stop at one shot, and he could not get a return shot at the bandit who was safely ensconced behind some rocks.

Carl Greene began to roll over and over, going faster and faster the further he went, until he tumbled into a ravine. Then he crawled along this for a few minutes trying to emerge behind the outlaw and get a shot at him. But Jesse James was gone.

He could find him nowhere.

It was near sunset next day when Jesse James suddenly came upon a towering cliff on the very edge of which stood an old wooden building which had been an old mountain mill. The mill had not been used since the war. Below it thundered a raging cataract which had once turned a mill.

The old dilapidated building stood so near upon the edge of the cliff that one might almost push it over into the stream.

The fall would be fully forty feet and the swift current would sweep it on to destruction.

"This is the spot," said Jesse, as he drew near the mill. "The boys all think it strange that I did not let them come with me, but I must do this alone."

What did Jesse intend doing? As we could never see any reason for our author keeping his readers in useless suspense, we will explain at once. Jesse James while with Quantrell's guerrillas during the war, became acquainted with a very noted robber named, Clark Hockinsmith. Hockinsmith had originated the modern industry of robbing banks.

He was killed in Kentucky at the close of the war. Before he was killed he told Jesse James that he had buried a million dollars under the ruins of an old mill in the Ozark Mountains. He had described the place so minutely that Jesse knew this must be the spot.

This information he had kept from every member of the band. He did not even entrust the secret to his brother, for Jesse was selfish. He preferred to have a million in gold all to himself rather than divide it with some one else.

So he had come alone to unearth the treasure and possess himself of all he could carry away.

"Yes, this is the spot—the very spot," said Jesse James, thoughtfully, and he entered the old mill building.

It was a strange, old affair, and so badly decayed that it shook with his weight as he walked across the floor. Suddenly an idea occurred to him.

"The money is buried under the house, why not push it off the bluff and over into the water?"

He found a long heavy beam of wood which would make an excellent lever, and, securing a log for a fulcrum he placed it in position, and discovered that he could throw the building over the bluff into the water by simply throwing his weight on the other end of the lever.

"But I won't do it until dark," he thought. "Some one might be near and see it fall. I will go all through the old building, meanwhile, and see what it is like."

It was two tall stories.

A narrow stairway led up to the second story. Jesse crept up the creaking, rickety stairs and searched among the rooms. Once or twice he thought he felt the old house give a lurch toward the precipice and felt uneasy.



"Wouldn't it be a death-trap to go over there?" he thought. "I wish I could send Carl Greene over in the house."

The upper loft was covered with leaves, and while kicking his feet about among the leaves his foot struck against something.

It was an old cartridge-box. Jesse opened it and found a bit of yellow paper in it, on which could be traced some lines. The lines were almost faded out, but he made this out:

"One hundred yards north of house \* 3 west  
\* \* \* \* \* six inches left big stone \* \* \* \* \*  
roll away—dig. \* \* \* \* \* CLARK H."

This note was a puzzle to Jesse. He understood by it that the treasure was not buried under the house, but near it.

"I will go and see if I can find the stone," he thought, putting the paper back in the cartridge box, and laying it in the corner of the room. Jesse felt almost as sure of the million in gold as if he had had it in his possession. "I will leave the paper here until I come back," he thought. "Then I will search the whole house thoroughly before I destroy it."

He went out.

He had determined to depend on his memory, so he did not take the paper with him.

The bandit chief counted off the distance as near as he could, then when it came to going east or west, he forgot which it was.

The sun was setting. He saw half a dozen rocks, either of which might be the one in question.

"I'll go back and get the paper and see, before it is quite dark," he thought.

The sun had set, and gray twilight, momentarily growing more somber, was overspreading the earth.

"Hello!" Jesse gasped.

He was just in sight of the house when he discovered a man going toward it.

Jesse crouched down among some bushes, cocking his pistol. The man's back was toward him, but he recognized him as Carl Greene, the detective. Before Jesse James could fire, he had disappeared into the old mill.

At this instant the highwayman's eyes fell upon the great lever under the house. One downward pressure and the house would go over the bluff. The detective had gone like a rat into a trap, and Jesse could hear him going up the stairs. With a demoniac smile, he leaped at the lever and threw all his weight on it.

Crack—crack, cracking—crash! the old house toppled over the side of the bluff and with a thundering boom went down. As it went, Jesse James saw the white face of Carl Greene for a moment at the upper window, and cried:

"Go—to your doom!"

## CHAPTER XII.

### COCK ROBIN'S COURAGE TRIED.

"Oh, just let me get er whack at that Midnight Horseman!" said Cock Robin Alread, somewhat boastfully, as he gazed fondly at his gun.

It was the next morning after the incidents narrated in our last chapter, and Cock Robin and old Hardtack, the veteran, were still in the mountains. They were on the stream which is called Ozark river. They are some miles below the falls, and a little to their left is an island in the stream.

The old veteran, who had heard Cock Robin's boasts before, said:

"Oh, you needn't blow quite so much, Cock Robin. Yer may hev yer courage tried yit!"

"That's jist what I want."

"Say, Cock Robin, yer don't want ther life scart out o' yer, do yer?"

"No."

"Wall, ef that air feller air who I think he is, ye'll git it scart out o' yer."

"What feller?"

"The midnight horseman."

"Who d'yer say he air?"

"Jesse James."

"Great Seott."

Before more could be said the old soldier looking up the stream, cried:

"Jeminy cracky ef thar ain't a part o' a house er comin' floatin' down ther river."

"Whar?"

"Look."

He pointed to the top part of the old mill building, which Jesse James the night before had tumbled over the bluff. It had caught upon the island and just broke loose, but a few moments before.

Mr. Carl Greene the most wonderful detective the world has perhaps ever known was really in the house when it broke over the bluff. He went down with it splash into the water, but by that time Mr. Greene knew no more.

Something had struck him, or he had struck something, he could never tell which, and he was insensible when he struck the water.

We will not pretend to deny that destiny, fate, Providence or whatever you may choose to call it rules over some people. A man, it seems cannot die until his time comes. The house struck the water, making a fall of forty feet, it went over a cascade and through the rapids and yet the part in which Carl Greene was still hung together.

He was so badly stunned that he did not recover consciousness until he found the part of the house landed against the island. At daylight he examined his surroundings and condition and found that beyond a few bruises he was uninjured.

He pushed off the part of the house, hoping to swing in near enough to shore to swim out. It was this floating object which attracted the attention of Hardtack and his companion.

"Hello, Cock Robin!" cried Hardtack.

"Wot, Hardtack?"

"Thar's some un in that house."

"Whar?"

"Look! don't yer see a head?"

"Yes, an' thar goes a hand."

"He yells."

"Help! help!" came from the flying wreck. The current was very strong and bore the wreck rapidly. Only two or three miles below was a waterfall twice as deep as the one above. To go over that waterfall was beyond doubt certain death. Carl Greene knew it, and, leaping from the wreck, he struck out for shore.

The men saw him swimming for life against the steadily increasing current, and Cock Robin tore off a long, tough grape vine, and threw one end to him.

They drew him ashore.

It was a stranger to them. Old Hardtack eyed him closely for a while, and said:

"Wall, pilgrim, yer hed ur ruther clus pull fur it, didn't yer?"

"Rather."

"How'd yer git thar?"

"I fell into the water last night."

But Carl Green had very little to say. He said he was a hunter from the other side of the mountains and had lost his gun, and, as soon as he could, he got away from them and hurried off into the mountains to a cavern, where he had established headquarters. In this cavern he kept clothes, arms, provisions and disguises.

"Jesse James thinks I am dead," said Carl Greene to himself, while a smile flitted over his face. "Very well, let him still believe it. As long as he believes me

dead, I can act without his being suspicious of my presence."

But for a moment let us return to Cock Robin and Old Hardtack. After they had spent an hour conjecturing as to who the stranger was whom they had drawn up out of the water, they decided to return to Hackett's.

"I say, Cock Robin, let's go back different roads," suggested Hardtack. "We may come upon that silent rider ef we do."

"I'm agreed, Hardtack, and I do hope I'll find him."

"Ye wouldn't attack him?"

"I would."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Why, ye'd git rubbed out."

"I ain't afeered."

And yet Cock Robin felt an inward dread—a sort of fear that he had boasted rather more than he should have done.

But Cock Robin prided himself on his courage, and he determined that, come what would, he would keep up a bold front. Consequently he shouldered his gun and started down the mountain path.

It was a delightful day.

The sun shone brightly, and the clear mountain air was balmy and soft. The birds were singing in the trees, and peace seemed to pervade everywhere.

Cock Robin grew bold.

"I wish I could meet that feller who calls himself Voljean, the Midnight Horseman, and Silent Rider o' the Ozarks. I would let him know that I do not fear him."

"Hello!" cried a voice.

He looked up and beheld a dark horse, on which was seated a man with a black mask over his face.

He was holding a cocked revolver in his hands.

"You want to meet me, Cock Robin, now I'll give your courage a trial," said a deep, terrible voice.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### GRACE ESCAPES.

COCK ROBIN was quaking with fear.

"You wanted to see me, I believe?" Jesse James cried.

"Are you—Val—Valjean?" stammered Cock Robin Alread.

"I am sometimes called by that name."

"W-w-w-well, I d-d-did want to see you, but I d-d-don't now as b-b-b-bad as I did," the fellow stammered.

"You were in the fight the other night?"

"Y-y-yes."

"That is right," cried Jesse. "If you lie I will catch you in it. You can't deceive me."

"N-no, I suppose not."

"You are right."

"I had to be in it."

"Ah, very likely. Now let that go. You are Cock Robin Alread, or Charles Alread?"

"Y-yes."

"You work for Mr. Hackett?"

"Yes."

"Very good; Cock Robin, do you want to die?"

"No—no—no."

"Oh, one no will answer. I will believe you just as well with one negative as if you were to repeat it a hundred times."

"But g-good Mr. Voljean, Mr. Midnight Horseman, and Silent Rider o' ther Ozarks, y-y-you don't intend to kill me?"

"I don't know yet."

"What?"

Cock Robin began to whimper.

"I can't just say what will suit my fancy best, you know. Oh, for mercy sake, do stop that whimpering."

"I will."



"I will have to shoot you if you don't."

"Yer needn't do that, pilgrim. I kin quit without yer goin' ter all thet trouble."

"Do it then."

"I'm done."

"Is that gun loaded?"

"Yes."

"Draw the shell."

His gun was a breech-loader, and he quickly drew the shells from it and said:

"Now, that's done."

"I don't believe the gun is any account. Break it over the rocks," commanded Jesse James.

"Oh, don't. It's a good un."

"Do it, I say; once—twice. I never command more than thrice."

"Oh, dear."

Crash went the gun, breaking it in twain, and then Cock-Robin threw away the useless barrel.

"That's all right, that is just as it should be," said Jesse James, when the work had been done to his idea. "Now, my friend, if all the guns in the Ozarks were in a like condition, it would be so much the better for the Midnight Horseman."

"K-k-kin I go?"

"Not yet."

"W-w-wot d'yer want?"

"Wait until I have interrogated you some."

Cock-Robin felt inclined to fly. He cast furtive glances left and right, as if seeking some spot at which he could make his escape. But the Midnight Horseman seemed to comprehend his thoughts, and raising that ugly-looking revolver again, until the muzzle was on a line with his forehead, said:

"Sit down, Cock Robin."

He did so.

"That is very well, my boy. I see you have a handsome face, and I would not like to spoil it. How long have you worked for Hackett?"

"Four years."

"He pays you every week?"

"Yes."

"Cash?"

"Yes."

"Never sends you to a bank?"

"La, no! Hackett wouldn't trust no bank."

"Why?"

"It might break, you know. He's got a good vault and safe o' his own."

"Where?"

"In his store."

Jesse James had gained the principal information he desired, and after asking a few more questions to throw the fellow off his guard, said:

"Cock Robin, I am a man with a mission to perform in life. I am supposed to be a silent man. But few have ever had the distinguished honor of talking with me as long as you have. Now, I want to exact a promise of you."

"What is it?" he asked.

"That you will tell no one that you saw me."

Cock Robin hesitated.

"Very well. Cartridges are cheap and it only takes one to finish you."

He raised his pistol until the muzzle was quite on a level with his forehead.

"Elevate your chin just a little," Jesse said, coolly. "I don't want to make any blunder in this. When I am forced to do a piece of work like this I always pride myself on the neatness and dispatch with which it is done."

"Oh, don't, don't!" cried Cock-Robin, shielding his face with his hands.

"There, there, I don't want to manacle your hands. Lower them, if you please."

"Don't kill me."

"Promise."

"I will."

"Swear you will not tell that you ever met me, or repeat a word that we said."

"I will swear."

"Now, if you lie I will know it," said Jesse in his deep, terrible voice. "Remember always that you can't deceive me."

"I know it."

"If you attempt to tell anything that has occurred I will know it."

"I know that—I know that!"

"If you ever whisper of this meeting you will die."

"I will never tell."

"Never?"

"Never!"

"Then go!"

He went. As Jesse James watched the retreating form of Cock Robin gliding down the hill among the rocks and bushes he said:

"I believe he will keep his word. If he does not, then I will know it, and he will be shot."

Jesse slowly rode over the hill and disappeared.

It is time that we should make some mention of Grace Harvey, whom we left in the hands of strange captors, whose masked and disguised faces were puzzling and strange to her.

Grace recovered from a swoon to find herself in a vast cavern. Above the lofty ceiling rose to the height of sixty or seventy feet, and the cavern extended to a distance lost in the darkness. She had an old woman whom they called "Granny Kitchen" for her attendant.

"Where am I?" she asked on finding herself in this strange place.

"Yer all right, honey," said Granny Kitchen. "Now don't yer go ter bustin yer lone sweet heart er cryin' fur I tell yer, yer all right."

"What do you intend doing with me? Surely you won't murder me."

"Oh, I reckon not."

The old hag chuckled as she made the answer, and Grace could not repress a shudder. Never had Grace seen a more disgusting old hag than this same Granny Kitchen. Her features were sharp, and her mouth having lost the support of her teeth had caved in so to speak, so that her nose and chin threatened to pay each other a long visit. Her fingers were like the talons of a vulture, and her sharp, cracked voice more nearly resembled the voice of a screech owl than any other animal to which it could be compared.

"Now, honey, don't yer go ter repinin'," said Granny Kitchen, "cos' yer in good hands. No one ever got erway from me yit."

"We are under the earth."

"Wall, I reckon so."

"But you must let me go to my mother."

"Oh, don't yer worry. Yer mother'll git erlong all right without yer."

"Oh, what shall I do?"

"Nothin'. Cos' yer can't do nuthin'."

"I must get away from here."

"No, yer mustn't. Cos' yer can't go no-how. I won't let yer, an' ther hull place is guarded."

"I see I am a prisoner."

"Wall, I reckon that air erbout the size o' it."

"What am I to do?"

"Nothin', I sed. Yer can't do nuthin'."

She buried her face in her hands, and began to sob.

"Wall, I reckon ez how yer kin blubber; I hadn't thought o' that."

Then old Granny Kitchen went off to a fire made of charcoal, so that no smoke would be emitted, and placed a pot over the fire. A few moments later a man

with heavy boots and spurs on, wearing his hair long, and fierce, black whiskers, come to where the old woman stood preparing her meal. They talked awhile in whispers, and then he gave the old woman a flask which evidently contained liquor. As he turned to go he said:

"Now, Granny Kitchen, don't yer git tight on that, or Jesse will kill me. D'yer hear?"

"Yes."

"Don't let him know I give it ter yer, or ye'll never git another drop from me as long as you live," the man said, as he turned about and went away.

"I won't."

When he was gone and Grace noticed the frequent deep draughts which the old hag drank at the bottle, her hopes began to rise. Surely if she becomes drunk I can escape," she thought.

The old woman went on stirring the pot and drinking.

After a few moments she began to sing. She grew hilarious and threatened to kill the prisoner if she attempted to escape.

Grace assured her she had made no attempt to escape.

"Now I'm goin' ter lie right down hyar and take er snooze, d'yer hear?—take er snooze—an' ef yer attempt ter escape ye'll find me after yer with a big butcher knife."

Grace shuddered, but made no answer. She lay crouching upon the blanket which had been thrown down on the rough stone floor, while the old woman stretched herself near her and went to sleep with the big butcher knife still in her hand.

Anon her snoring indicated that she slept. The knife fell from her hand with a ring on the stone floor.

Grace reached out her hand and took it. Then she rose and glided forward into the darkness. She knew not whither she was going, but groped her way on, on, and on, holding the knife in her hand as her only weapon of defense, and, young and weak as she was, she determined to defend her life.

It was not judgment, nor was it instinct which guided her, but luck or chance. She groped along a rough stone wall seeming to her to go for miles, before a dark, gray light loomed up before her.

Creeping near to it, she saw it was a dark lantern. Two men lay asleep near it. They had rifles at their side, and one empty bottle which told the story.

Both were drunk. They were guards, drunk and asleep on duty.

At a single glance Grace understood it all, and she sat down a moment to rest and hold her hands to her beating heart. The hope of escape almost overpowered her. Creeping nearer to the sleeping men she listened to their heavy breathing which indicated that their slumber was profound.

She removed their arms, then softly took up the light and stole away. About twenty paces further, she came to the outlet of the cavern, and for a moment sank down overcome at her escape.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### HOPE BLIGHTED.

It was night. The stars were shining brightly from a cloudless heaven, and the gentle breeze was toying with the leaves.

Grace soon recovered her strength, and casting a glance at the dark mouth of the cavern, cried:

"Away, away—I must away from this dread spot."

She ran through the forest.

It was a wild, picturesque landscape, but dimly lighted by the stars, and she was a stranger to this part of the Ozarks. She wandered on, and anon the moon rose and



lighted up the scene with a flood of glorious silver light.

Suddenly the sound of horses' hoofs fell on her ear.

She paused with beating heart and palpitating breath. A tall man, mounted on a horse black as midnight, was seen coming toward her. His face was concealed by a mask, but he was armed to the teeth.

"The Midnight Horseman, or the silent rider of the Ozarks!" the girl gasped, sinking down upon the ground so low in the grass, that he passed by without seeing her.

When he was gone and the last faint echo of his horse's hoofs had died away in the distance, she arose from her hiding-place and slowly and carefully groped her way along through a wild tangle wood.

At last she emerged into a path.

The east was growing brighter. Day dawned and she found herself in an unknown part of the mountain wilds.

Still she did not despair. She traveled and rested by turns until the day was high spent, and she was still in an unknown part of the mountain.

The horrors of another night in the wilderness seemed to almost freeze the blood in her veins.

Just as the sun was sinking behind the far off mountain peaks, she espied a man on a distant plateau coming toward her. The rays of the setting sun falling upon him showed his face to be familiar.

"Ben—Ben—Ben!" she cried.

It was Ben Morgan.

He heard her voice and halted.

"Ben, don't you see me?"

"Grace—Grace, is it you?"

"It is."

He ran to her side.

"What are you doing here, Grace. Where have you been?" he asked.

"I have been abducted by somebody, carried off and kept a prisoner in the most horrible place I ever saw in all my life."

"Who abducted you, Grace? We know you were carried off, and have been scouring the whole mountain country to find you but in vain. Who carried you away?"

"I don't know."

"Did you learn their names?"

"No."

"What was their object?"

"I only know I was asked to sign some papers."

"Did you?"

"No."

"What was the object of signing the papers?"

"I don't know."

"Do you know their contents?"

"No."

They sat down upon a stone to rest, and Ben heaved a sigh. This mystery was puzzling to him.

"I wish I knew to a certainty if Silas Flynn had anything to do with this," he said.

"I believe he has all to do with it, yet I know nothing. But, Ben, where were you going?"

"Searching for you."

"Are you alone?"

"No, Hardtack, Cock Robin and the Hacketts are out in the mountains all searching for you everywhere."

"What part of the mountains are we in, Ben?"

Ben blushed to confess that he was lost.

"But I am very glad I am lost; perhaps I should not have found you any other way."

"Let us go, Ben."

"Are you rested?"

"Yes, and then we are not yet out of the reach of those men. We must go.

Those men, those terrible men! I don't want to fall again in their clutches."

"I have to confess I don't know the way, yet we will wander about until we do find our way out."

They set off down the mountain slope.

Night came quickly and they were in total darkness, for the clouds obscured the sky.

But after awhile the clouds rolled away and the moon rose.

"Had we not better wait until morning," asked Ben.

"No—go on to-night."

"Travel in this wild mountainous country of deep ravines and mountain precipices is dangerous. We must run many risks of breaking our necks."

"I know it—but the danger is not half so great as it would be to remain here."

"Do you think these abductors are men?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps they have seen us," said Ben, laying his hand uneasily on his revolver.

"They have."

"Why do you say that?"

Laying her hand on his arm, she said:

"Hush—I saw one of them peeping at us out from the bushes."

"When?"

"Not ten minutes ago."

"Grace—Grace—why did you not tell me!"

"Because you would have fired at the head, and thus brought on a fight. We must avoid a fight and escape if we can."

Ben was alarmed and far more eager to escape than she.

With a revolver in his hand he led the tired fugitive down the steep and thorny path which led down the mountain side; she was very tired and would have gladly rested, but they dared not stop.

At last they came to a deep precipice with a cataract flowing through it.

"How are we to cross?" asked Grace.

"I don't know."

"Ben."

"What?"

"There is a log across the stream."

"Can you walk the log?"

"If some of the branches were cut off of it, I could."

"I will go and cut them off, and then I can carry you over."

The log was a fallen pine tree of great length. The butt end of the log lay on the side of the bank next to them, and the smaller end on the other side. At the smaller end the branches were quite thick.

"Grace, will you be afraid to wait here until I go over on the other side of the log and cut off the branches?"

"No."

"Are you quite sure you won't be afraid?"

"No—I won't."

He went out on the log and began with his heavy knife whacking off the branches from it until it was clear.

Grace was standing watching him, when she saw the dark shadow of horse and rider. They paused at her side, and the rider stooped and seized her.

She uttered a shriek.

"Help, help, help, Ben!" she cried.

Ben saw the silent rider of the Ozark with Grace in his arms.

He raised his revolver, when the midnight horseman holding the captive before him as a shield, cried:

"Fire, if you dare, and your bullet will blow out the life of the girl whom you love."

#### CHAPTER XV.

#### THE MAN IN NO. 9.

"CHECKMATED!" cried Ben.

"I think so," said the horseman.

"Ben—Ben!" cried Grace.

"What?"

"Shoot!"

"No, I dare not."

"Shoot, never mind me. Better death than be again taken away as a prisoner to their den."

"I cannot."

"Shoot!"

"Hold, girl; don't urge him!" cried the silent horseman. "See, I have him covered with my revolver, and I will put a bullet through him if he so much as dares to fire."

"Ben, don't shoot!" cried Grace.

Brave girl! She was willing to risk her own life, but she could not risk the life of the man whom she loved.

"Well, Ben, have you decided not to fire?" cried the Midnight Horseman.

"I cannot."

"Stop where you are."

Ben began walking across the log toward them. The silent rider's horse began to back from the scene.

With a hand of iron he seized the girl and raised her to the pommel of his saddle, where he held her and covered Ben with his revolver.

"Back, Siroc."

Siroc began to back slowly from the scene.

"Ben, don't stir!"

"Stop, or I will fire!"

"I've got a bead on you. Shoot if you dare, and I will send a bullet through your head, and your own bullet will strike the girl."

"Stop, Ben, don't come!" cried Grace.

"I will."

"I will kill you," cried Jesse James, knowing that the threat would cause the girl to use her utmost influence to stop him from advancing.

"Don't come, Ben, don't come!" she cried. "Stop right where you are!"

"I will rescue you, Grace. I don't care how much he threatens my life. Let him take it if he will. I shall rescue you at any and all hazards."

Jesse James saw it was necessary to adopt some other measures.

But he was full of resources, and never long at fault in any plan. Changing the muzzle of his pistol from the breast of the lover he pointed it at the heart of the girl and cried:

"Halt!"

Ben saw his change of tactics and stopped.

"Now, advance another step and I will fire and send the girl to eternity."

Ben stood on the log as if rooted to the spot. Jesse James cried:

"Right about, Siroc—hark, away!"

With a gay toss of his head, the well-trained animal wheeled about and dashed away into the forest, disappearing from view, leaving Ben Morgan standing on the log half inclined to hurl himself into the raging current below, and thus end the struggle.

"No," he finally cried. "I have been outwitted, but I will yet follow them up, and I will yet rescue her at all hazards."

Meanwhile Jesse James on his sure-footed animal was at lightning speed traversing the most intricate mazes of the forest. Into the deeper paths and gloomiest part of the forest where the foot of man seldom ever trod, he went.

In a portion of the forest-hidden mountains there was a great indentation which seemed as if it had been at one time a split that threatened to divide the mountains. The bend was wide enough for a cottage to be set in the natural embrasure and far into it, so far that the drooping branches



and clinging vines completely hid it from view was a small log cabin.

Jesse paused for a moment at the front of the entrance to pull apart the tangled vines which covered the enclosure and then rode in. Fifty paces within this deep throated canyon he found a cabin.

He dismounted, still holding his silent and frightened captive on his arm. With his whip he rapped on the door and called: "Hilloa! Open the door."

There was no answer.

"Hilloa!"

Still no answer.

Rap! rap! rap!

No answer yet.

Then he raised his foot and kicked the door so violently that he shook the whole house to its very center.

A few seconds later the door partially opened and a cracked voice said:

"Wot ails ye?"

"Sally, are you asleep?"

"Wall, ef I war, I reckon ye'd wake er feller, wouldn't yer?"

"I've got a companion for you, Sally."

The door opened wide enough for Grace to see the face of as hideous a looking old woman as it had ever been her lot to gaze upon. She was forced into the cabin and Jesse James said:

"Keep her, Sally, or you will die. Don't you dare to let her escape or it will be the last of you, let me assure you of that."

She was pulled into the interior of the cabin, led along a narrow passage into an apartment which was evidently a subterranean apartment dug under the hill.

Meadwhile Jesse James wheeling his horse about rode away.

Day had just begun to dawn when Jesse suddenly discovered a man on the hill opposite him. He drew his pistol, but quick as he was, the stranger got a shot first.

The ball whizzed past his head.

"It's Carl Greene," he remarked.

Then he galloped Siroc down the hill.

Carl Greene was the great bug-bear of Jesse James and all his band. He was the dread of all bandits.

Jesse shook him off at one moment, only to find him on their trail once more. Then he began to despair.

"I must kill that fellow," he reflected. "Yet that does seem impossible. I must shake him off."

Jesse hit upon a plan for shaking off his pursuer and drawing him out of the country which is nearly always successful.

That night he assembled the band at their rendezvous and said:

"Boys, we have got to do something to throw the detective, Carl Greene, off the trail."

"Well, what is your plan?" asked Jim Cummins, his small black eyes flashing with fire.

"My plan is simply this. You all lie low for a few days, and I will take a run down to St. Louis."

"Why?"

"He will follow me."

"And catch you, foolish fellow," cried Jim.

"Not much. I will get him in the great city and lose him."

"Yes—can you?"

"Certainly."

"Well, do you keep a sharp lookout that he doesn't bag you."

"I will."

"Now, Jess, what shall we do?" Frank asked.

"Lie low, that's all."

Then Jesse left them.

For the time being Jesse James was compelled to part with Siroc.

Now a professional highwayman of the Missouri class, is almost out of his element

out of the saddle. The James Boys had grown up in the saddle and were never noted for deeds of daring when dismounted.

When with Quantrell, Todd and Anderson learning the art of robbery on the grandest scale ever known in the civilized world, they went mounted.

But Jesse was compelled to leave Siroc and go on foot.

Disguised as a mountaineer he descended the mountains and took the valley back for the nearest railroad station.

One morning just as the sun was rising, Jesse, in the disguise of an old mountaineer, with his frosty beard powdered yellow with snuff, sat on a box on the depot platform smoking a pipe. Two or three old men and women and some children were there waiting for the train.

Suddenly a man was seen walking down the railroad. There was nothing particularly strange about the man save that he had great, bushy black whiskers.

He carried a valise in his hand, and had the air of a countryman going on a journey.

A few moments after his arrival the train came, and Jesse rose to go on board.

As he did so he passed near to the man with black whiskers, and almost started to discover they were false.

"The fellow is disguised," he thought. "Aha! It's Carl Greene. Now I could kill him, but I won't yet. I will lead him off the track first."

Jesse James was not inclined to commit murder unless it was to his advantage.

He boarded the train, and it had scarcely started ere he discovered the disguised man on board of it.

Jesse felt a little uneasy.

"Can it be he knows me?" he thought.

The disguised man was a very civil kind of a fellow.

He said nothing to anyone but sat looking over the surrounding country at the green fields and vast farms of which Missouri alone can boast.

"He is playing a shrewd game," Jesse thought. "Let him follow me to St. Louis, there I will shake him off."

They reached the Grand Central Depot at St. Louis, where was found the usual jam and crowd of people.

Jesse James rose and determined in the crowd to get rid of his traveling companion.

He went out of the car, boarded a private carriage and went thundering away down the street to the Merchant's Hotel, kept by the Luby Brothers. There he registered as Mr. Blasco, from Clarence, Mo.

His manner was that of a countryman.

"Where is my room?" he asked of the clerk.

"Let me see, I would put you in No. 9," said the clerk, "but I have just sent a man to No. 9. He is a queer fellow too, with the greatest, blackest whiskers I ever saw in my life."

Jesse James started.

"The man in No. 9 is the disguised man who came with me on the train," he thought. "I must see the man in No. 9."

"However, he was externally perfectly cool."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### ON THE HOUSETOP.

JESSE JAMES was assigned room number eleven just opposite room number nine with only a narrow corridor or hall between them.

He went to the room.

"Now I will watch that fellow," he thought.

Jesse placed his eye to the key hole and saw the bushy head of the black whiskered man peeping over the transom.

"Oho, some one else is watching," Jesse thought. "Now to foil him."

At midnight Jesse glided from the room and left the house.

He went to the Southern Hotel next, and remained there a day or two.

When I have shaken off the rascal, I will then return to the Ozarks and make good our plans with Si Flynn and rob the Hackett safe."

Two or three days later Jesse was walking down the street, when he espied a poorly-dressed young man before him.

The fellow was looking in at the windows of jewelry shops as he went along in a surprised way.

At this moment Jesse turned his eyes about by the merest accident, and espied a no less personage close behind him, than the big, black-whiskered man.

"I do believe that fellow is Carl Greene," he thought.

If it was Carl Greene, he had his suspicions of Jesse James, and was shadowing him. Knowing the wonderful cunning of the detective, Jesse James felt no little uneasiness at his being so near.

"That fellow can really see through a mill stone," he thought. "He has no doubt seen me—knows me and is only playing out his line before he lands his fish."

His reflections were brought to a sudden end by hearing a crash.

A scream followed.

The window of a jeweler's shop had been broken by the poorly dressed young man whom he had noticed, and Jesse James saw him filling his pockets with jewels and diamonds.

The black whiskered man was in pursuit in a moment. Jesse got out of the way. The crowd swayed, the men ran, he next saw them enter a tenement house and heard a tremendous racket upon the house top.

But Jesse made it a rule to never interfere with other people's quarrels and he got out of the way.

Next day he took up the St. Louis Republic and read the following account, of what he had only caught a partial glimpse, the day before:

"BATTLE ON A HOUSETOP. STRUGGLING AT THE COPING'S VERGE. THE FOOTHOLD OF THE GUTTER SAVED THE OFFICER'S LIFE. AN OPEN SCUTTLE TERMINATES THE FIGHT. THE THIEF ARRESTED."

"On a slippery housetop, almost sixty feet from the pavement below, Detective Greene, of Chicago, yesterday did battle for life with a desperate thief. At one time the two men struggled upon the very verge of the coping, and the score of spectators below stood dumb and paralyzed with horror, expecting every instant to see the body of the officer topple into the awful void and fall a lifeless, mangled mass at their very feet."

"It was just after lunch time and Detective Green was walking to the Planter's Hotel, when he saw a poorly-dressed young fellow smash in the show case in front of the store at No. 191 Mulberry street, and deliberately begin to cram the jewelry from it into his pocket. Greene rushed at him and the thief catching sight of the officer, turned and ran."

"He had a good start and made the most of it, but in spite of his twisting and turning, Greene stuck doggedly to his heels. Suddenly the thief spied an open door in a tenement house and made for it. Up the stairs he leaped, story after story, with the detective close behind. The scuttle to the roof was off and the thief dashed up the ladder and out upon the slippery roof."



"Greene followed him, but as he was about to step upon the roof the thief called to him: 'Stay where you are! If you come out here I'll throw you off, sure!' He was a powerful-looking fellow and there was a wicked gleam in his eyes. He had taken off his shoes so that he would not slip, and was crouched like a tiger ready to spring at his pursuer, should he venture out upon the roof.

"Greene hesitated for but a moment. Then, determined to capture the criminal at any cost, he stepped out. In an instant the thief was upon him, and a struggle had begun which looked as though it might mean death for one or both of them. Step by step Carl Greene was forced back to the very edge. His opponent seemed endowed with the strength of a madman, and the footing was so insecure that he could not brace himself. A crowd of women had gathered in the windows and on the roofs of neighboring houses, and passersby in the streets were looking up, trying to discover what was going on.

"They were on the very verge, and Carl Greene had almost lost hope when he felt his foot slip into the gutter and hold fast. He had gripped the thief by the throat, and was holding on with the energy of desperation, for he felt his body swaying over the gulf below, and those in the street saw it too, and stood, fascinated with horror, waiting for the end. The tide of battle turned. Greene, finding he had a firm foothold, made one more desperate effort, and fought his would-be murderer back a little. This gave him new courage, and now the detective had the better of it. He rushed his man to the scuttle, and just then both fell and went headlong to the landing below. Both were dazed by the fall, but Carl Greene recovered the more quickly, and when the thief fully recovered his senses again he found himself in the street, with a neatly-polished pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

"At the station house the young desperado gave his name as Frederick Clark, and said he was 22. Though so young, he is an ex-convict, and is known to the police as a desperate character. He was held for the Grand Jury."

"That Carl Greene is a plucky fellow," said Jesse James, laying aside the paper. "I cannot but admire him, much as he has made it unpleasant for me. Had I not read this account in the St. Louis Republic, admitted by everybody to be the most reliable newspaper in the land, I would regard such an adventure as only fitted for a novel; but it is true. It is always true that things continually happen in real life which we would think impossible."

Jesse did not meet the black-whiskered man any more.

The St. Louis Republic reporter had given away Carl Greene in that disguise.

Carl was too shrewd to let them know what object had brought him to town. He simply changed the color of his whiskers. The day before they were black, now they were red.

He was roaming the streets around, searching for some clew of Jesse James.

At every hotel the red-whiskered gentleman carrying a slender cane in his hand, and looking very much like an unassuming business man, might have been seen examining the directories, and finally he turned away from a small hotel, saying:

"It is his handwriting."

Jesse had changed hotels three or four times since he stopped at the Planter's House.

The pleasant-looking gentleman took up lodging there also, and then waited.

"If Jesse is here I will see him soon,

and learn something about him," he thought.

He went out on the street, and returned at dark.

"Well, I am here," he thought. "I wish I could find him. He came here to throw me off the track, but I will not be derailed this time."

He was sitting at a table in the reading room, glancing over a paper, when he suddenly discovered a gray whiskered man watching him over his spectacles.

Carl Greene at once recognized Jesse James despite his disguise.

"My fine fellow, you will not escape me this time," he thought.

"Say, stranger."

Some one struck Carl Greene a whack on the back.

"What?"

"Do you know me?"

"No."

"What, don't ye?"

"No, I never saw you before. You are a rude fellow."

Carl Greene rose for he feared Jesse would escape.

But the half-tipsy man who had accosted him was not to be disposed of so easily. He was a commercial traveler who fancied that he saw a resemblance in the red-whiskered stranger to some one he knew.

"Ain't you Bill Meeks?" he asked.

"No."

"Yer some kin to him."

"Who are you?"

"Frank Parker is my name."

"Well, sir, I have other matters to attend to."

"Come, let's hev a drink?" began the commercial traveler.

Jesse James was going up the stairway.

Once more he was about to escape from Carl Greene, and that individual leaped forward like a whirlwind, and ran up the stairway after him.

Jesse saw him coming and fired a shot at him, and ran.

He was pursued so closely that he was forced to fire at random.

The bullet knocked off Carl Greene's hat, and yet he paused not for a single moment.

He ran like a whirlwind after Jesse.

Up flight after flight he pursued him, until at the seventh flight Jesse James opened the skylight and emerged on the housetop. The moon shone brightly, and Carl Greene followed him.

"Stop!" cried Jesse James.

He leveled a cocked revolver at Carl Greene, and the detective covered him with his own pistol.

For a moment the two men stood glaring at each other.

It was only the calm which precedes the storm.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### CARL GREENE AT FAULT.

TIGERS at bay glaring at each other could not evince the fierceness that the detective and Jesse James betrayed.

Their eyes gleamed with the fury of demons.

Yet neither fired. One was waiting for the other to commence the conflict.

"Surrender, Jesse James!"

"Never!"

"If you don't you will die."

"I won't die."

"You will."

"Then, Carl Greene, we will go together," said Jesse James.

"Remember that if we die you are not prepared."

Jesse James laughed. He had braved death too often to dread it now. His cheek turned not one bit paler at the threat.

Some one was heard coming up the stairway behind them.

Carl Greene heard the footsteps very distinctly, and said:

"Come on, I have him."

"What does this mean?" asked Parker, leaping out on the roof and seizing Greene.

"Unhand me."

"It saves your life, Carl Greene," cried Jesse James, with a laugh.

"Let go your hold on me," cried Carl Greene.

"I won't," shouted Parker. "What are you fellows goin' to fight about?"

"Unhand me, will you?"

"No."

With a loud laugh, Jesse James disappeared over the side of the house.

The detective partially shook off Parker, and fired at him. But the bullet only grazed the shoulder of the bandit king of America as he went over the side of the house.

Down the side he went dropping on to a roof about twelve feet lower than the first.

When he reached the second roof he ran along it a long distance, then slid down a gutter pipe at the imminent risk of his life to a roof but two stories in height.

A fire escape was here visible, and by means of it he reached the ground.

Jesse then ran down a street for a few paces, and was turning a corner when he ran plump against a man.

The fellow gave utterance to a loud grunt.

"Oh."

"Beg pardon."

"Great Lord, I'm about done for."

"Joe, Joe is that you?"

"If ye mean Joe Shelby it is, but who are you?"

"Your friend."

"Then don't knock out my breath."

"Don't you remember when we were with Quantrell?"

"Yes. I was with him."

"I am Jesse."

"Jesse James?" whispered Joe.

"Yes."

"What—what are you doing here?"

"I am pursued. I am chased by the detectives."

For a moment the man rubbed his stomach and said:

"Do you know any way I can help you, Jesse?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Come with me."

Jesse led him down the street, whispering:

"Joe, can you take me any place where we can talk with each other?"

"Yes."

"Do it."

He led him to a small house where they entered a room. It was a small room, and Joe said: "Fire away."

"Joe, I want you to disguise as I am now, and play that you are me."

"Why?"

"Draw the detectives away from me so I can escape."

"What, Jess?" cried Joe, in amazement.

"Hush, Joe—not so loud."

"Why?"

"We may be heard."

Then Joe lowering his voice, said:

"Jesse, I don't understand you. Won't you explain what you mean?"

"I mean that I have a detective on my trail."

"What is his name?"

"His name is Carl Greene."

"What?"

"Carl Greene! Do you know him?"

"Well, I've heard of him, and they say



that whoever he once sets his eyes on never escapes."

"He is the shrewdest detective living."

"I have heard that he was and I can believe it. How can you expect me to outwit him?"

"You must."

"But how?"

"Change clothes with me!"

"Well, what then?"

"Keep out of his way."

Jesse James and Joe Shelby were about of the same height and of the same complexion, Jesse wore a short cropped beard, while Shelby wore a great bushy beard.

Jesse James took a pair of scissors and trimmed the beard of Joe Shelby to resemble his own.

"Now, when we have changed clothes we will look enough alike to be brothers," said Jesse.

"Indeed, we will."

"This disguise won't, of course, fool Carl Greene himself, but we can get it so others will answer to his descriptions of Jesse James that they saw me. Keep out of his reach as long as you can."

"I will."

They then changed clothes, and Jesse, donning a pair of false whiskers, looked like another being entirely.

"I will beat him yet," Jesse thought.

In this disguise he sallied forth, and half an hour later Joe Shelby emerged from the house and went down the street.

Carl Greene came hurriedly up the street and went direct to the house.

With that true and wonderful instinct, rather tact, he had traced him to the house.

He had heard that a man bearing the description of Jesse James had gone to that house.

On his arrival he learned that a man bearing the description of Jesse James had left the house.

"Which way did he go?"

"Down that street," answered the man whom he met on the corner.

Then Carl Greene went down the street.

He was going down the opposite course from the way Jesse James had really gone.

Carl Greene was on the wrong trail.

By the time he gained the street, Joe was four blocks away.

Joe went into a lager beer saloon and sat down.

Never did a man play his part with more shrewdness than Joe Shelby. He was well adapted for that business, for he was in full sympathy with Jesse, and wanted to do all he could for him.

"Hello!" growled a fellow as Joe entered.

"Who are you?"

Joe had been about the dens of St. Louis enough to know a thief or confidence man at sight. This man combined the faculties and talents of both confidence man and thief. He read him like an open page and when he saw him, said to himself:

"I can make use of this fellow."

Aloud he asked:

"Do you drink?"

"Yes."

"What will you have?"

"Whisky, straight."

"Well, I am partial to something stunning, so I will take whisky, too."

He rapped his knuckles on the small table, and called:

"Waiter!"

The waiter came.

"Two whiskys straight."

Two whiskys were brought and the men drank.

"Now," said Joe, "what is yer trade?"

"You ain't in it."

"Yes I am, maybe."

"Who are you?"

"Say, fellow, I don't like to tell."

"Are the beaks on your trail, or is it cops?"

"Both."

"Are they hot on your trail?"

"Yes—I expect him every moment."

"Who?"

"Carl Greene."

"Carl Greene?"

"Yes, do you know him?"

"Yes, I should smile. Why, every fellow that picks a pocket knows him."

"Is that your line?"

"I don't say what my line is."

"But it is."

"Oh, get out!"

"Now look you here, friend," said Joe, confidentially, "I am in a fix. There is a reward of fifty thousand dollars for me. I am close run."

"Fifty thousand?"

"Yes, fifty thousand. What do you think of it?"

Joe knew the fellow's cupidity would be aroused, and it was.

"Say, you must be a big one, pardner. You must be well up in the pictures."

"I am," Joe answered.

"If Carl Greene comes, and come he will, I want you to try and put him off the track."

"I'll do it if I can."

Joe then hurried away, saying: "I am going over to East St. Louis to lay there a few days and then I'll come back and see you."

Joe Shelby had played his cards fine. He went out on the street and went hurriedly to the Mosier hotel, where he put up for the night.

The man with whom he had talked was part gambler, part confidence man, and a petty thief. He was not a brilliant fellow, but just the kind to lead Carl Greene astray.

"Now that fellow is wanted for something big," he reasoned. "I bet it's murder. Carl Greene is after him. Well, I will know Carl Greene when he comes in, and I'll see if I can't get him to divvy the reward with me. If he does I will help him," said the confidence man.

Half an hour later Carl Greene, with a skill and instinct that was wonderful, went to the saloon at which the man personating Jesse James had entered.

No sooner had he entered than he was recognized by the man with whom Joe Shelby had conversed.

Carl Greene, in his cautious, prudent but rapid way, began to investigate.

The confidence man did not move from his seat. He knew the detective would come to him soon if he would wait. He was correct. Carl Greene came to him almost directly.

"Hello, Phil. I know you," said Carl Greene.

"Yes, but it's not me you're after this time."

"No."

"I know the kind of a fellow you want."

"You drank a glass of whisky with him?"

"Yes."

"Well, where is he?"

"In East St. Louis."

"East St. Louis?"

"Yes."

"Why did he go there?"

"To avoid you. Now, look here, Carl Greene, there is a big pile offered for that fellow, and I know it."

"Do you?"

"Yes—I don't know who he is, but he's a high swell, and I can help you out if you will only allow me to have a share in the prize."

Carl Greene looked at the fellow from head to foot.

"Do you know anything?"

"Yes."

"Much?"

"Ye bet."

"Phil Smith, lying is your unholy profession, and you will deceive me as readily as any one else. You would be more liable to do it."

"But the reward. I won't get any of it unless you get your man."

"That's so. I will give you five hundred dollars if you will tell me where I can lay hands on my man."

"Oh, will you?"

"Yes."

"You won't?"

"A thousand."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"I will double it, but not a dollar more."

"Make it twenty-five hundred."

"No, sir, not a cent more than two thousand dollars."

"Very well. Your man just left for East St. Louis, and you will find him in the Griggs House asleep."

"Smith, are you throwing me off the track?"

"No."

"You may be—if you do I will pull you."

"Go on and see."

Carl Greene set out for East St. Louis. He hired a carriage and was whirled away to the big bridge. He crossed the bridge, and was driven to the hotel.

But at the hotel Carl Greene for the first time learned that he was at fault.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### DOWN THE CASCADE.

HAVING, as he supposed, effectually shaken off Carl Greene, Jesse James hastened by the next train to the Ozarks.

"My work is well done," he chuckled, rubbing his hands gleefully. "I've done him up this time."

He left the train at the same depot he had taken it, though Jesse had of course changed his disguise, and was recognized by no one.

He set out for their secret rendezvous at once and reached it at midnight. Jim Cummins was on guard at the entrance to the cave, and came very nearly shooting Jesse James before he knew who he was.

"Hold up, Jim; it is I. Don't be too handy with your infernal pop-gun!" said Jesse.

"Jesse!" cried Jim.

"Yes."

"You have come back?"

"Yes. How are you all?"

"All well—doing first-rate, except Frank. He got scared at another ghost night before last," said Jim, laughing.

"It is rather strange about Frank's superstitions," said Jesse James. "He will never get over them, it seems."

"No."

"And the girl—Grace Harvey, our prisoner?"

"She is well."

"Have you been molested?"

"No."

"Seen anything of the people about Hackett's store?"

"Yes; they have been in the mountains almost every day."

"You have had no encounter with them?"

"None."

"It is well."

"Flynn, has he been here?"

"Yes."

"Frequently?"

"A dozen times."

"Drunk or sober?"

"Both."

"What did he want?"



"He wants to induce the girl to sign some papers."

"Did she?"

"No."

Then Jim was silent for several moments and asked:

"Jesse, what is the meaning of those papers and why does he want her to sign them?"

"It is a release of her interest in a large estate that has fallen to them jointly," Jesse James answered.

"I thought it something like that."

Jesse passed on into the interior of his cavern, where his bandits were carousing and drinking.

A few torches, stuck about in the niches of the rocks, threw out a glow of light upon the scene, and but dimly lighted the faces of the rough bearded men.

At sight of their chief they rose and gave utterance to a prolonged yell and cheer.

"Hello, chief—hello!" they cried. "What have you done with your shadow?"

"Shook him."

"Where?"

"In St. Louis."

"How?"

Jesse James then, in as few words as possible, narrated how he had managed to shake off Carl Greene.

"Well, Jesse, the plan was a good one," put in Wood Hite.

"Of course, you had thought it all over beforehand?" said Bill Chadwell.

"No, I hadn't."

"Why?"

"I didn't know I was going to meet Joe."

"That's so."

"By the way, Jess, how does Joe look?" asked Jim Cummins.

"Pretty well."

"Getting old?"

"Not much."

"I hope I will see him some day. Ah, how well I remember those old guerrilla days when we used to sweep Missouri from its headwaters down to St. Louis."

"So do I," put in Wood Hite.

"Joe was a host then."

"Boys," interposed Jesse, "I am going to sleep. I stand very much in need of rest and so do you, for we have some hard work on hand to-morrow."

"What is it?"

"To-morrow night I am going to make the first attempt on Hackett's store."

"Hackett's store?" cried all.

"Yes, I am going to see what we can do toward ascertaining what is in that safe?"

"I can tell you," put in Jim.

"What?"

"Money, and lots of it."

"Do you want money?"

"Does a hungry dog want meat?"

"Well, Jim, you shall go with me to-morrow, and we will see what we two can get out of it."

Jim Cummins knew what it was to go with Jesse James on such an expedition. He knew that it meant danger.

Jesse seemed to take special pleasure in defying death, but Jim Cummins was not one to stand back on account of danger, and he said:

"I will be ready."

Jesse went to bed and soon was asleep. He slept soundly all night, at early dawn he awoke, and going to the guard Jim Younger, said:

"I want to see Siroe."

"He is in grotto eight."

"Then I will find him."

"Do you want him saddled?"

"No, I am going on foot to-day."

"Who goes with you, Jesse?"

"Jim Cummins."

"Then there is danger."

"No doubt of it."

Jesse hurried away to the grotto or cave for his magnificent steed. The noble Siroe whinnied and came down to his master, where he sniffed his clothes and rubbed his nose against Jesse's shoulder in infinite delight.

"Never mind, you old fellow, you shall soon have an abundance of exercise," said Jesse.

Siroe continued to stamp the stony ground, his steel-toed shoes emitting showers of sparks from the stones.

Jesse threw him some hay, poured some oats in his trough, and went into the main assembly room where the banditti was.

Some were still sleeping on blankets, others were up dressing or washing at the subterranean spring which flowed through the cavern.

The bandit king of America asked:

"Where is Jim Cummins?"

"Asleep."

"Wake him."

In a few moments Jim Cummins was aroused.

He proceeded to wash at the subterranean brook, and sat down to breakfast.

After breakfast he rose and turning to Jesse, said:

"I am ready."

Jesse James had already breakfasted and was ready to go.

"Come on, Jim."

"Do we go on foot?"

"Yes."

They went out of the cavern, each taking a rifle.

At the last grotto before leaving the place they paused long enough to disguise themselves. In this apartment were numerous disguises, and they appeared as two seedy looking mountaineers.

Under their coats, well worn and brown, were deadly revolvers, and the rifles, though they were muzzle loaders, and old-fashioned, were true shots.

"Jesse, are you really going to Hackett's?" asked Jim.

"I am."

Jim made no objection or comment.

Wherever that redoubtable chief led, he was perfectly willing to follow.

Down the mountain path in the blinding morning sun which caused the dew on the trembling leaves to sparkle like a million diamonds, the bandit king of America and his companion went.

It was a bright morning and the mountain air was fresh and invigorating.

"One feels glad they are alive, such a morning as this," said Jesse.

"They do."

"Hello, who have we there?"

"Look below!"

On a plateau below them were half a dozen men standing in a group.

"They are mountaineers are they not, Jim?"

"No—they came from the valley from Hackett's."

"Well, then, they are the very men we want to see."

"Jesse, are you mad?"

"No."

"Why, how you do talk."

"What do you mean?"

"Are not those fellows looking for us?"

"Of course."

"Well, then, they want to find us. Let's go down and form their acquaintance."

"Well, Jesse, you are a cool one, and I will dare anything that you do. So here goes."

"Come on."

They started down the hill, when Jesse suddenly paused, and turning about to his companion, said:

"You are neighbor Grubbs, and I am

Stubbs. That's it, don't get them confused. You're Grubbs and me Stubbs."

"All right. I am Grubbs, and you Stubbs."

"Come on."

"I am following."

The very boldness and audacity of the thing promised success to the bandits, and Jim Cummins was willing to trust to Jesse's plan.

They went down among the bandit hunters, Jesse James saying, in his peculiar Missouri tone:

"Good mornin' neighbors. Neighbor Stubbs and I were on the mountains—"

"Hold—he doesn't belong here!" cried Ben Morgan, who was one of the group from Hackett's. "He is one of the bandits of the mountains."

"Surrender!" cried Hardtack, and he raised his rifle. Jim Cummins struck it out of his hand with his gun and knocked Cock Robin down.

Jesse leaped back and raised his gun and fired at Ben. Mr. Hackett struck up the gun and the ball whistled through the air. The bandits beat a retreat.

Five or six shots were fired at them, but they were too hasty to be accurate. The bandits ran over a hill down a slope, and the pursuers hard on their heels.

"Here's a river Jesse."

"And here's a boat, Jim Cummins."

"Get in."

"Yes—not a second to lose."

Even as he spoke the men on the bluff fired and bullets rained about them. They pushed off the boat and the dropping balls splashed up the water on every side.

Down the swift current they glided. Jesse was angry and began to reload his rifle.

"I'll make it a warm day for them," he said.

He heeded not the roar of a cascade below him, and the boat swept on while he aimed at Ben Morgan to kill him.

"We are lost!" shouted Jim.

Jesse then threw down the gun and looked up just as the boat shot down a cascade.

#### CHAPTER XIX.

##### IN HACKETT'S STORE.

"JIM."

"What?"

"Hold fast."

"We are lost."

"Hold fast."

"Can't we back out now?"

"No, we must go over, but the boat may survive."

Jesse James and Jim Cummins clung to the side and bottom of the canoe, and it went like a flash over the water-fall, soaring down like a bird.

There was a swish, a whirl of air about their ears, and the spray of the water flashed up all about them.

Jim Cummins found his eyes and mouth full of water.

He could not see, and he gave a tremendous yell.

"We are lost—lost," he shouted.

But the boat struck the bottom with a glancing, upward bounce, and went spinning far out into the middle of the stream. Away they went down the stream, flying right before the thundering waterfall.

Both the bandits were thoroughly shook up by the fall, and their boat was more than half full of water.

The men far above them who had in awe and even horror observed them plunge over the cascade, could see no more of them, for a vast cloud of spray and fog rose up before them and shut out their view.

"They are done for!" cried Uncle Jerry Hackett.

"Yes, better'n our bullets could do it," put in Hardtack.



"But, oh, what a fate!" cried Ben Morgan.

"No worse'n been blown ter pieces by er cannon ball, or hev a bomb shell bust in yer stomach. Now, my colonel once had a bomb shell come right at him. That air bomb shell meant business, too, and et busted right plump inter his gizzard, whew—we couldn't get ernuff tergether ter hold a funeral over."

"I don't expect there will ever beenough o' them fellers found worth while diggin' a hole for," said Uncle Jerry Hackett.

"It's awful!"

"Death is always awful."

"Where did they get the boat?"

"It was Sol Stahl's boat. He left it there when he was here fishing."

"Well, his boat's gone."

"Of course."

"I wonder, if those were the outlaws, what they have done with her?"

"The captive?"

"Yes, with Grace Harvey."

"No one knows."

"She may be in some old hut, cave or hiding-place, where she will starve for want of food."

Ben Morgan was in despair, and throwing himself on the ground, he beat his breast and tore his hair in his anxiety.

Meanwhile, Jesse James and Jim Cummins, dazed, stunned and confused by their plunge over the waterfall, were speeding down the stream.

Jesse was first to recover his presence of mind.

Emptying his mouth of water, he asked:

"Jim!"

"What?"

"Are you dead or alive?"

"I am not quite settled in my mind on that point."

"Well, I think we are all right."

"But the waterfall?"

"We are over that—let us talk about a new subject."

"But surely no one could go over that and live."

"We did."

"Oh, no—you can talk on any subject you want to, and not convince me we did that."

"Yet we did."

"And live."

"I believe now that I am alive. Yes, I feel quite well satisfied on that point."

"Well, Jesse, you are noted for being cool headed and maybe you are right. If you insist that we are in reality alive of course I must agree with you on the matter, although any man who says that a boat could go over that waterfall and live, deserves a chromo for the biggest liar on record."

Jesse James seized an oar and pushed the boat in toward shore.

He guided it up among some willows where they could disembark without being seen.

"We can leave the boat here," said Jesse. "Among these willows they would never think of finding it in the world."

"No."

"They imagine we are dead."

"So do I."

Jesse laughed.

"Jim, you are droll."

"Yes, I feel so."

"Now, come, get out of there."

"I suppose that defunct people can walk, and so I will make an effort to."

He rose from his seat in the boat and began to get out. He went up the embankment after Jesse, who parted the willows with his hands.

"Where are you going, Jesse?" Jim asked.

"I have not abandoned my original design."

"Going to Hackett's?"

"Of course."

"To-night?"

"Yes."

"Why, after that shaking up?"

"Oh, such a little thing like that is not going to balk my purpose."

"No, I suppose not. Well, Jess, I want to say for you, you are a good one."

"Am I?"

"I think so."

"Thank you—let us move on."

"I am willin'."

They went up the hill side and in a nook under a ledge of rock Jesse said:

"Halt!"

"The command is halted, general," said Jim Cummins, in his droll, comical way.

"Well now, Jim, let's have a look at our arms."

"Arms, by jingo, boy, I'd forgotten whether I had arms or legs either."

"So had I almost. I see we have lost our guns."

"It's a wonder we have not lost our heads."

"That's so."

"Well, I've got all my revolvers in good condition."

"So have I."

"And my knife is keen as a razor."

"So is mine."

"I believe now that upon the whole we are all right."

"So do I."

Then came a silence.

"How far is it to Hackett's?" Jim asked.

"It can't be over five miles."

"No, I guess not, and it's only noon. What are we to do first?"

"Eat dinner."

Jim laughed.

"Where'll we get it?"

"Oh, there are cabins somewhere around at which a person might get a good square meal."

"All right, if you dare it I do."

"The risk is slight in comparison to doing without any grub," said Jesse James.

"But when they learn that two men called at the mountaineer's cabin and got dinner they will believe that we escaped."

"They won't know whether it is ourselves or some other fellows. There are a good many people in the Ozark Mountains."

Jesse led the way down a mountain path where the trees grew so dense a rabbit could scarce squeeze between them.

At last they came in sight of a cabin.

As they were going down hill the roof of the cabin was the first thing that met their eyes. The sun was shining upon the cabin in all its splendor.

It was a small cabin, and from the wide chimney down which the travelers could look and see the floor and hearth beneath, there came a thin blue smoke.

"We'll get dinner here," said Jesse James.

They went to the door and rapped on it with their knuckles.

The door opened and a woman about forty years of age with a pipe in her mouth appeared. She carried the pipe in the right corner of her mouth, and had carried it there so long that the pipe pulled down that corner, making it considerably lower than the other side.

She glared at them and with a nasal twang said:

"Howdy!"

"How are you?" Jesse returned.

At this moment a lazy cur dog rose and barked.

"Will he bite?" Jesse asked.

"He won't bite nothin' but bread."

"Well, I am not bread, so I suppose I am safe."

"I reckon so," and she smiled a sickly, sallow smile.

"We want dinner."

"Yer do?"

"Yes."

"Law sakes erlive, I ain't got er thing cooked."

"Cook some."

"Ain't got er dust o' flour in ther house."

"Have you any meal?"

"Yes."

"And bacon?"

"Yes—some."

"Suppose you give us a dinner of corn hone and bacon."

"I kin do that."

"We'll pay you."

"All right. I'll scrape up some flour mebber fur yer."

"Do so, good woman."

She began hunting about and Jesse James threw two silver dollars on the table.

"Those are yours."

"Oh, goodness, never seed so much money in er coon's age!" cried the woman.

She busied herself and prepared some biscuit and stewed dried apples; she got out a dried apple pie, some dried venison and fried chicken.

"This don't look like starving," said Jesse, as he and Jim sat down to the table.

"No, not much."

Having made a good meal, Jesse rose and handed the astounded woman a ten dollar gold piece.

"Oh, thank ye," she said, "but I can't make change."

"Keep it all."

"What!"

"Keep it to buy tobacco. Don't tell any one that we are in the neighborhood, and we may call some other time and pay you more than this."

"Oh, good land, I wouldn't mention et ter any one. Don't yer be skeered o' me tellin' my old man. Why, ef he knowed I hed all this ere money, hed hev et an' git drunk in spite o' ther nashun an' high water, yer kin bet."

"Don't tell him."

"I won't."

When they were gone, Jim Cummins asked:

"Do you suppose she will keep our secret?"

"Was a woman ever known to keep a secret?"

"No."

"She is no exception."

"I suppose not."

They traveled to within two or three miles of Hackett's and stopped.

The sun was two or three hours above the horizon, and Jesse called a halt to wait until it had set.

They lay in some bushes not far from the road, and while waiting for the protecting shades of night to cover their designs, they heard several men pass.

"We didn't find her," said one.

"That's Ben Morgan," hispered Jim Cummins.

"I know it."

The passers by, unsuspecting of danger, went on talking.

"I believe that Silas Flynn is at the bottom of her abduction, Ben."

"So do I."

"I wish I knew it."

"And don't I."

"Why, we'd make a hanging bee and stretch his neck."

"Yes, but let us be sure."

"You are too good and noble, Ben."

"No, I am not. No man is."



"I tell you you are now. If you wasn't you'd hang him on suspicion as you ought to. He ought to be hung and you are keeping him from it."

The two had now passed so far on their way that Jesse and Jim could not hear what was said.

"Well, Jim, Ben's a good kind of a fellow, after all, isn't he?"

"Yes, he is."

"I kind o' like him."

"So do I."

"But he is dangerous to us, and we may have to kill him."

"Yes."

"I wish night would come."

"It's coming fast."

"But how are we to kill time until it does come?"

Jim Cummins put his hand in an inside pocket of his coat, and drew out a deck of greasy cards.

"Now, Jess, I'll make it interestin' for you at a dollar ante."

"I'll do it."

They played cards until it was too dark to see.

Then they put up their cards, and crept away towards Hackett's store.

The hamlet and the great store which was the center of attraction for miles around, soon loomed up.

It was ten o'clock, and the people at Hackett's had nearly all gone to sleep.

A few lights burned in the dwelling houses, but the great store was all dark.

Jesse and Jim Cummins crept around to the rear.

There was a cellar under the building with iron gratings for windows.

Jesse James got a long pole and placing it between two of the bars, slowly forced the entire grating out.

This done they had a means of entrance. Jesse then whispered:

"Come!"

"I will follow."

He climbed down into the cellar and Jim followed. Both were in Hackett's store.

## CHAPTER XX.

### ESCAPE.

"JESSE," whispered Jim Cummins, "have you got your lantern?"

"Yes."

"Light it."

Jesse James took off his broad-brimmed hat, and, striking a match, shaded his hand with the hat until he lighted the dark lantern.

"Is it lighted, Jesse?"

"Yes. Jim, look out of the window and see if the way is clear."

"It seems to be."

"Be sure."

"I can see no one. Flash your light and let us see where we are."

Jesse James flashed the light about the cellar, and saw only a great array of boxes and piles of goods.

There was a flight of stairs ascending up to the floor above. Jesse James and his companion climbed the stairway to the floor above, entering by means of a trap-door. When they were going up the stairs Jesse James saw what seemed to be a great flue, or chimney built in the ground and running up the center of the building.

Jesse halted when midway of the stairs, and gazed at the brick and stone structure.

"I wonder what it is, Jim?"

"I don't know."

"I believe I do."

"It's a chimney."

"No."

"What then?"

"It's no doubt the vault."

"The vault, nonsense."

"If it isn't a vault where is a vault?"

"You will find only a big iron safe and no vault at all."

"We shall see," said Jesse. "Wait until we get to the top of the stairs."

They reached the trap-door and entered the store as we have seen.

Jesse darkened his lantern so that it might not be seen through the door, and they crept forward to the door.

The front door had plate glass in it, and Jesse gazed out of it at the street.

All was still. No one could be seen.

"I don't know, Jim, whether we dare flash a glim or not," Jesse said.

"Why?"

"We might be seen through the glass in the door."

"I don't know. By the way, Jesse, I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"Let us take some of the goods from the counters and place them over the glass."

"That's it."

They found plenty of heavy cloth, most-

ly jeans and woolen stuffs of which Hackett and Son carried a big line.

"There, it is done," said Jesse, when they had pinned up the cloth. "Don't it shade it complete?"

"Yes."

"Flash your glim."

Jesse turned on the light.

"Oh, the windows; see the windows!"

"Hasten to cover them."

He ran and covered the windows with some coarse cloth, and then Jesse once more flashed on a light. It showed a large store room, the shelves of which were packed to the very ceiling with goods.

"This is a rich store, Jim," said Jesse.

"Yes, it is."

"How much larger it is than some in the city. They carry in stock everything, too, from a tin whistle to an elephant."

There were piles of goods in great profusion of every kind. Here lay a pile of calicoes worth thousands. There were great heaps of woolen goods; in one corner was a millinery assortment suitable for the mountain trade; there hats and caps, boots and shoes, drygoods, groceries, and queensware; there was hardware, fire-arms and cartridges, pistols in abundance.

"It seems to me, Jim, that we have found a good place in ease of a siege."

"So we have. Here are guns and ammunition."

"And food."

"And clothing."

"But where is the vault or safe?"

They gazed all about the room. They went forward and searched the corners, they went to the rear and then to the front, but no safe was to be seen.

Jesse James turned upon his companion and asked:

"Well, Jim, what about the burglar and fire proof safe?"

"I don't know."

"Don't see it."

"Nor do I."

"There is none."

"No."

"Well, I am quite certain there is a vault."

"So am I now."

"And that was the vault we saw."

"I suppose so."

But if there was a vault, the great and all important question was—where was the vault?

They searched for a few moments, when Jesse discovered it.

It was in the center of the building, between the partition part of the two rooms.

He went to it and examined it.

The great iron door was closed and locked.

In addition to the lock of the iron door, they knew that inside of the vault was a safe that was double locked with a patent lock, and had a fire and burglar-proof combination.

"Well, Jim, we have a big job before us," said Jesse.

"I know it."

"And what is worst about it, we have not suitable tools."

"No, the job is just a little out of our line."

"I know it."

Jesse sat on the head of a flour barrel and gazed at the lock and safe for a few moments.

Suddenly he started:

"Jim, Jim," he whispered.

"What was that?" asked Jim.

"Some one is in the house."

"Yes, I believe it."

"How did they get in?"

"Down below."

"At the lower window?"

"Yes."

"I will go down and see who it is."

"No."

Jesse turned out the light and they crept behind the counter. In a few moments the creaking of the cellar stairs told them quite distinctly that some one was coming up the stairway.

Jesse cocked his revolver and told Jim to do the same.

"Who can it be, Jess?"

"Whist, not so loud."

They were talking in whispers heard scarcely above their breath.

"Who can it be?"

"Some one who belongs to the store."

"Is that all?"

"I hope it is."

"Well, we will salivate him."

"Salivating is not always so easy as it seems," Jesse James answered in a faint whisper.

They crouched behind the counter, for the footsteps could now be distinctly heard.

Slowly and cautiously some one was creeping up the stairway. Jesse James

was quite certain that whoever was approaching was aware of their presence.

The trap door raised so noiselessly that none but a keen ear like Jesse's could have heard it.

Jesse seized Jim Cummins' arm and drew him to one side of the house and into another apartment.

"Jim, that is a master hand who is coming up the stairway."

"Why?"

"His maneuvers show it."

"We will see. Who do you think it is?"

"Carl Greene."

"What?"

"It is certainly the detective."

Jesse had left the door partially ajar, and now he crept to it and listened carefully.

He could hear some one moving about as softly as if he walked on shoes of wool. He watched the room for a moment, though it was so dark he could see nothing. Suddenly a thin ray of light dawned about the room. The stranger was turning on the light of his lantern.

The ray darted across the room, struck against a polished mirror and was flashed in the face of the holder. Only an instant was it flashed in his face, but that instant was enough for Jesse James to recognize Carl Greene, the shrewdest detective on the force.

Jesse went back to Jim and bade him go and look from the window and see if the way was clear.

Jim did so, and returning, said:

"There are two men there with double barreled shot guns."

"And one inside with a murderous looking revolver"

"Who?"

"Carl Greene."

Carl Greene was coming in the room where they were, and the bandits finding a narrow stairway, crept up it into a room above.

"Jim, Carl Greene has in some way got onto the racket that I was here and has come back from St. Louis. We have to play a fine game now."

"Can't we get into the attic?"

"Yes, let us try."

A ladder led up into the attic, and they followed it.

Out of a sky-light upon the roof, the bandits crept, and their crawling along the comb of the house to the rear gable end. Jim had a stout cord which he made fast to the end of the roof, and let himself down to the ground.

Jesse followed, and both had escaped from the house, but they were by no means safe yet.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### SIROC'S MAD LEAP.

"JESSE JAMES!"

"Yes."

"Are you all right?"

"I am, Jim. Do you see any one?"

"No."

"Look carefully, for they have an armed man behind every stone."

Not ten paces away loomed up a well curbed.

The James Boys crept slowly and cautiously to it. A dead silence fell on everything. The stars gleamed in the sky but the moon had not yet risen.

There seemed no danger, but Jesse James knew only too well that oftentimes when there is no apparent danger at all there is really the greatest danger. He was not to be deceived by silence.

They were almost at the well when a man suddenly rose from behind it, with a gun leveled at Jesse, and said:

"Stop!"

Jesse James was accustomed to surprises, and of course was not thoroughly unmoved. He was not an instant inactive.

Dropping to the earth, he seized a handful of sand, which he flung into the man's face.

Bang! bang! went both barrels of the shotgun. They boomed like small cannons, and the flash seemed to light up all the sky and earth like a flash of lightning.

Jesse James heard the shot whistle an inch or two above his head. He leaped at the man, and a third shot rang out on the air as Jesse James and Jim Cummins flew down a steep, narrow path.

"There they go!" roared a voice.

"Fire!" shouted another.

The last voice came from the house, and Jesse James and his companion recognized it as the voice of Carl Greene.

As Jesse and Jim ran from it to the well where they had encountered the man with the shot gun, they left him lying on the ground to be picked up by his companions.

A volley was fired at the fugitives and



the bullets whistled like hail above their heads. It was not many moments, however, until they were beyond range of their guns and pistols.

"Jim, we are all right for the present," said Jesse.

"Yes, but the vault?"

"It's still there."

"It don't do us any good."

"It won't go away."

"It know that, yet we have made no headway toward getting into it."

"Yes we have."

"What headway, I would like to know?"

"We know where it is."

"Yes, but that is all."

"That is much."

"If it's to be guarded by an army with shot guns, I would like to know how we are to get at it."

"By strategy, my dear boy,"

"Strategy! Pray, tell me how we will get at it by strategy?"

"There are many ways. First we can get the fellows out of the neighborhood. Coax them off on a false trail, then make a dash at the store."

"You have Carl Greene to deal with."

"Yes—but I will get him off for a while at least."

"Do you think, Jesse James, that even you can outwit the keenest detective ever on the force?"

"I don't doubt it," Jesse answered. "I have done it on more than one occasion, temporarily. When I led him off to St. Louis, you remember, I had the best of him."

"Well, I suppose you did. Confound him, I don't care to lock horns with Carl Greene," growled Jim Cummins.

Jesse and Jim were pursued, of course, but in a country affording so many excellent hiding-places as did the Ozark mountains, there was little trouble in throwing off the keenest pursuers.

They traveled for two or three miles without stopping, then came to one of their secret haunts in the mountains. It was a small grotto and they lay there all next day.

The place was so cunningly concealed that, though their pursuers could be heard all about them, they did not discover them.

When night again came Jesse said:

"Jim, let us be going."

"I am ready."

"Come!"

"All right."

They crept from the secure hiding-place.

"Where are you going, Jesse?"

"I am going to mount Siroc again."

"Aha! the midnight horseman will once more ride the Ozarks."

"Yes."

They went to the great grotto where the remainder of the band were.

"What luck?" was almost the first question asked.

"None," was the answer.

Then Jesse James proceeded to tell them of their wonderful adventures since leaving.

"What! you don't mean to say you went over that cataract and lived?" asked Bob Ford.

"Yes."

"Well, then don't tell it, Jesse."

"Why?"

"Because heretofore you have borne a fair reputation for truth, and I would not have you lose that reputation."

"Don't you believe it, Bob?"

Bob scratched his head and said:

"I will try, though it is going to be a heavy strain upon my faith."

"Very well, strain it."

Jesse James went to see Siroc. He was feeling well and needed exercise very much.

He stamped his iron shoes upon the ground as Jesse entered and neighed for joy.

"Woah! Be easy, my fine fellow, for I will give you plenty to do yet," said Jesse James, stroking the neck and main of the horse.

Next morning Jesse mounted his horse.

Have you ever seen a racer brought upon the track to the breaking line, dear reader? Have you not noticed how he will prance and stamp the earth, and how eagerly he will wait for the word to "break?"

One would have thought that Siroc, Jesse James' wonderful horse, was a trained racer, waiting for the word from the starter.

He could scarce stand until Jesse James was in the saddle. Then away he bounded over the rough, uneven ground.

Jesse had never appeared as the silent rider of the Ozarks in daylight, but he had always appeared at night.

Now he was, by a new plan, to defy the mountaineers.

Along the mountain paths he flew like the wind.

Over the rugged roads, and up and down hills, heedless quite which way he took, until he had descended some distance.

The blue smoke curling up from a mountain cottage warned him that he was nearing a human habitation. One acquainted with the Ozarks and the character of the people living there, can know but little about them, and the stories of these hardy mountaineers seem almost incredulous.

Their houses are small, mere huts, built usually against the mountain steep where one can look down the wide chimney from the bluff above and see the people in the only room which the house contains.

Jesse drew rein on the bluff above and listened to voices below.

The morning was wonderfully still, not a breath of wind was stirring the air, and voices could be heard an incredibly long distance.

"I don't believe they are dead. I don't believe they were killed in going over the waterfall," one man was saying.

"By George, I ought to know that voice," said Jesse, thoughtfully. "It must be old Uncle Jerry Hackett. Now, why is the old gent out on the mountain at this early hour? Surely it may endanger him from another attack of rheumatism."

"If I only knew where Grace was and could get in sight of her I would ask no more," said another voice.

"Ah, that is my poor friend, Ben Morgan," thought Jesse James, in his most ironical mood. "Now I feel sorry for Ben. What a pity it is that he cannot have it all his own way, but he can't. Ben and Grace would make a lovely pair—and loving, too, no doubt, for they adore each other. But I have decreed that Silas Flynn shall wed her, and he will, I have no doubt. They are relatives—quite distant I believe, but money interests compel them to marry."

Then the men below began talking again, and Jesse James listened once more to them.

"Where did the detective go?" asked Ben.

"To the mountains," answered Hackett.

"Did he say so?"

"No."

"Then how do you know?"

"There can be no doubt of it."

"One can never tell just what a detective is going to do."

"No."

"Well, let us be stirring."

"Ben!"

"Yes."

"I believe you will wear yourself out. Why don't you take matters easier?"

"Don't be afraid on my account, Mr. Hackett. I am going to find her, rescue her, and then for the robbers who tried to rob your store."

"Never mind my store," said kind old Uncle Jerry Hackett. "I would rather lose every particle of my goods and every dollar I have in the world than lose an opportunity to rescue that poor girl!"

"She shall be rescued."

"Good for you, Ben. I will stand by you."

"So will I," cried another.

"So will I."

"So will I."

Then Jesse, who had approached the verge of the precipice where he could overlook the scene below where a dozen armed men were grouped together, could not resist the temptation to cry out:

"So will I."

All eyes were turned to the bluff above, and never were men more astounded.

"By George!"

"Gee whillika crickets!"

"Jerusalem!"

"The midnight horsemen!"

"The silent rider of the Ozark."

These and a dozen more like expressions burst on the air.

Ben Morgan said nothing.

Quick as a thought he clapped his rifle to his shoulder and leveled it at the daring outlaw.

Jesse James knew his peril, and was prompt enough to withdraw from the danger line.

Back—back he reined his horse until he was out of the line of rifle ball which came whizzing upward within a few inches of his face.

"He is up there—he is up there," roared Ben; "after him."

Jesse James, though out of sight, was not out of hearing, and with a loud discordant laugh shouted:

"Come on, Ben Morgan, bring those mad fellows with you and I will lead you a merry chase."

"Come on, we will have him!" shouted Ben.

"Yer right, comrade," roared old Hardtack, fur ye see it's too rough fur cavalry up there. Cock Robin, ye deserter, where are ye?"

"Right on hand."

"Come, dress up yer lines now, double quick march, and away ye go!"

Jesse James had climbed a steep part of the mountain and paused to look down below on the men when there came a little puff, five or six hundred feet below.

"Crack!"

Sharp and keen on the mountain air came the shot, and at that altitude it made but little noise.

The bullet passed within a few inches of Jesse James' head.

"It was a closer shave than I expected," Jesse James thought.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Bullets whizzed all around him and clipped the ends of his hair, and another cut a hole through the brim of his hat, while a third just touched the end of his coat collar.

"This grows interesting," thought Jesse.

As he ascended the rugged steep he turned in the saddle and cast a glance behind him down upon the scene below.

He saw a man climbing a rocky precipice. The distance was great, but Jesse James was a marksman who had performed wonders before and could again. He drew his most trusty revolver, the one of the longest range, and cocked it.

"Woah, Siroc. Just a moment, my boy."

The fellow was climbing up the steep, rocky side, clinging to the brambles and jutting rocks. Only occasionally could his head be seen bobbing up and down, and he leveled his pistol at the head.

It disappeared behind some brambles, but Jesse knew the spot at which it would reappear, and held the muzzle of his revolver right on the spot, waiting for the head to reappear. It did, and as soon as it appeared in the sights which covered it completely, he touched the trigger.

Crack!

Sharp and keen the report rang on the mountain air.

The man at the side of the embankment uttered a shriek or death yell, and for a moment there was a wild struggling and scrambling among the bushes on the hillside, then he released his hold and went rolling and tumbling down, heels over head, until he struck upon some rocks, and after one or two convulsive turns and clutchings, became still.

Crack!

Crack! came a pair of rifle shots from below.

The bullets struck close to the horseman, but he laughed at them.

A time was coming, however, when he was not to laugh.

Just as he gained the plateau a score of men, some mounted and some on foot were seen coming toward him at a brisk pace. Jesse reared himself in his stirrups and cast a troubled glance about him.

He was hemmed in on three sides by the armed men, who knew how to handle the rifle and shot gun effectively.

On the fourth side was a deep gorge, or chasm, which was fully twenty feet across. Had ever horse leaped such a chasm? Jesse for a moment hesitated between dashing across the chasm and making a dash through the enemy. It was more than he dare do to break through that line of mountaineers, each one of whom was an expert marksman, so he resolved to try the chasm.

"Come, Siroc, for your maddest leap."

The noble horse seemed to realize what was depending on him and darted forward like a bolt from a cross-bow. Everybody stands amazed and gazes on the scene. The chasm is reached and horse and rider like a bird sails over it.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### JESSE IN THE LOW LANDS.

JESSE JAMES held his breath, and his heart seemed to almost cease beating as he flew over the awful chasm. He would hardly believe that he was safe when Siroc landing upon the opposite side, gave vent to a snort of relief and galloped on over the uneven ground.

"Wail, may I never serve on another skirmish line, if it don't beat my time!" cried old Hardtack.

"Great gosh!" cried Cock-Robin.

Ben Morgan was the only one who had presence of mind enough to fire a shot at the flying man who sped forward like the wind.

Jesse James descended the slope and was upon the plain below.

He was now in the low hands, which



were in places thickly wooded, affording many excellent hiding-places.

He had shaken off his pursuers and resolved to give Siroc a few moments' rest.

Near by was a creek, and he rode Siroc into the water and washed his legs and sponged out his mouth with water before he allowed him to drink.

Then they went out upon some green grass.

There Jesse removed the saddle from the back of his noble steed, and allowed him to feed upon the grass and rest.

"It can't be far to a farm-house," Jesse thought. "These rich valleys are so well adapted to agriculture that there must be a great many farms among them. Now I will try and find a safe one, and we will have some refreshments, my noble Siroc."

Resaddling, Jesse mounted once more and rode westward until he came to a broad field. On the opposite side of the field was a farm-house.

He could see near it stacks of wheat, rye and barley, and afar off the tall, rich, waving fields of corn.

"There will be an excellent place to feed," he said.

An old man was standing by the gate. Jesse accosted him with:

"Good-morning, sir."

"Good-mornin', stranger."

"Do you live here?"

"Wall, I ain't er dyin' hyer."

"I mean is this your house?"

"Don't egsactly know. I reckin et would be ef ther mortgage war paid off'n it."

"Well, my friend, can I get something to eat here and some feed for my horse?"

"Wall, now, my pardner, I dun know erbout this thing. I'll hev ter ax ther old woman."

"How long will it take to do that?"

"Erbout two minits."

"Do so, then, and bear in mind while you are doing it, that a hungry man is waiting here for something to eat."

The old farmer gave Jesse James a keen glance. He looked hungry enough, and he went to urge his scolding wife to cook some food for him, especially as the stranger had exhibited a considerable amount of money.

Jesse got his breakfast and Siroc was fed, then he took his departure.

"Come again, stranger," said the old man, as Jesse mounted.

"I will, my friend."

"What mought yer name be?"

"I am Paddy Powers."

"Wot air yer business?"

"Oh, I am a preacher."

"Be ye the circus rider uv this ere circus?"

"Yes."

"Wall, I reckin ye'll come roud every month."

"Oh, yes, an' perhaps oftener."

"Hope yer will, every leetle helps, yer know, and we've got that air mortgage ter pay off, too."

"That is too bad."

"Yer bet it is."

Jesse James bade the old man adieu, and started Siroc at a gallop down the road.

It was late that evening when the bandit king, who was tolerably well disguised, was riding down the road very leisurely. He suddenly came upon an old man mounted on a dapple gray horse.

The horse, like the master, seemed to be advanced in years and jogged along at a sleepy gait. As Jesse cantered leisurely along on his horse the old man turned his head slowly and gave him a curious glance, as if to say:

"Who are you?"

"Good-evening, grandpop," said Jesse.

"How dee do, Jcems? Ain't you Jcems West?"

"No."

"Who be yer?"

"Paddy Powers. Don't you know me?"

"No. D'yer live down in Arkinsaw?"

"Yes."

"Wot yer do?"

"Preach."

"Preach, eh? Be yer a circus rider?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm glad ter meet yer, 'eos we've got er feller at our house, yer kuow, wot I believes needs er preacher."

"Why?"

"Oh, he's in er bad way."

"How?"

"Hoss fell down with him an' erbout busted his head. He don't know nothin'."

"Who is he?"

"Dun know fur sartin, stranger—I dun know fur sartin, but I kinder suspect he be a ossifer."

"You do?"

"I do."

"Why, do you think he is an officer?"

"He air allers er talkin' about robbers

an' the Jcems Boys, yer know, 'cause he's out o' his head an' don't know nothin'."

"Where is he from?"

"He air from Chicago, and I kinder suspect he was one o' them thar detective fellers."

A detective from Chicago! Jesse James was interested. No doubt the injured stranger was his old enemy, Carl Greene, who had met with some accident. If he was at the farmer's house wounded and insensible, Jesse James thought he would never have a better opportunity to put him forever out of his way.

The eagerness of the bandit to get at his foe and rid the world of him was remarkable.

He asked:

"Old man, how far is it to your house?"

"My house?"

"Yes."

"Erbout two miles, I reckin, mebbe two miles an' er half, an' now it mought be possible it war three."

"Are you going home?"

"Yer bet I be goin' straight and squar hum."

"Can I go with you? I want to see the injured man."

"Why, he ain't got no sense. He can't talk nuthin', only 'bout ketchin' Jcems Boys, who war er-robbin' Hackett's store, an' then suthin' erbout Pinkerton an' detectives."

"Poor man, he needs my counsel in this. I must go to him. Please take me."

"You really mean it?"

"Ofcourse I do. I am a preacher, and it is my duty to minister to the suffering."

"All right, Mr. Preacherinan, ef yer kin stand et at our pore house, yer welcome ter all we've got. Come on."

They rode down the road side by side, and Jesse James, disarmed of every fear, had no thought for anything but speedily terminating the life of a man who threatened to take him to the gallows.

"Let me once get sight of him in his feeble and helpless condition," he thought, "and I will never let him escape me."

They came to a shallow brook, and as they were crossing a gust of wind blew off the old man's straw hat. It fell into the water and Jesse's companion said:

"Thar, I've lost my hat; yer younger than I be, won't yer git down an' pick et up?" Jesse being anxious to hasten on dismounted and picked up the hat, when he turned to hand it to the old man he found himself covered with a revolver.

"Surrender, Jesse James!" said Carl Greene, for it was he.

#### CHAPTER XXIII.

##### A RIDE ACROSS THE MEADOW.

JESSE JAMES was never more astonished in all his life than when he found the revolver muzzle within ten or twelve inches of his head, and heard the command given by the detective for him to surrender.

"Carl Greene!" he cried.

"Yes, Carl Greene at your service."

"Well, I must say, Carl, you have the drop on me."

"I think so. Come, Jesse, let us have this little affair over without any rupture. You kuow I have no desire to harm you."

"Oh, no! You just want to turn me over to the tender mercies of a few fellows, who will hang me for a public exhibition."

"You shall have a fair trial, Jesse."

"Oh, no; I would rather be excused from any fair trial. That is what I most fear," Jesse answered, with the reckless laugh of a bandit chief.

"You are a jolly fellow, Jesse."

"You are quite clever, Carl Greene."

"Thank you. Please raise your hands. I have but little time to wait on you. Much as I dislike to do it, if necessity compels me, I will put a bullet through your head."

"Will you?"

"Yes. Up hands!"

"Well, how do I look now—like Balboa discovering the Pacific?"

Carl Greene was somewhat puzzled at the coolness of the bandit, though fully aware of the dangerous character of the man. He was also at a loss to know just how to handle the matter. How was he to disarm the captive and put his handcuffs on him?

Carl was standing on the bank almost at the edge of the water and he said:

"Jesse."

"Well, Carl."

"Step this way please."

"Anything to accommodate you, my dear friend Carl."

"Then keep your hands up."

"Oh, yes, I am pointing in the direction of the stars."

"That's good."

Carl Greene was feeling with his left

hand for his handcuffs, while with his right he kept his revolver pointed at his captive.

He found the handcuffs, they closed with a spring lock, and had a steel band to go about the wrists.

Carl Greene went cautiously yet boldly forward to the outlaw, and holding the pistol in one hand and the handcuff in the other, he tried to slip the handcuff over the wrist of the bandit.

But Jesse James carefully kept his hand out of reach.

"Now, Jesse, be easy and I will not hurt you."

"Carl, this is a slippery game," said Jesse.

"Rather."

Jesse James then cleared his throat with a loud: "Ahem!"

No sooner had he done so than Siroc, the well-trained steed of the outlaw, dashed forward at the speed of the wind and ran against the detective and hurled him backward into the water.

He went with a splash into the stream, just as Jesse James fired a shot at him. The ball struck the water above Carl Greene's head and face.

Had he not been buried under the water he no doubt would have been killed by the shot.

Jesse James sprang into the saddle and galloped away.

In a moment Carl Greene was on his feet. His revolvers were loaded with waterproof cartridges, and they were not injured by being wet.

He mounted his horse as soon as he could, and put the animal to the top of its speed after the flying outlaw.

Away they sped pell mell over the road along a level stretch.

Carl Greene was well mounted and his horse pressed Siroc closer than they had supposed he would.

Jesse James, who was amazed at the close pursuit, drew a revolver, and said:

"Now, I believe I will put a shot through him."

The distance was great, but the bandit raised his pistol, took aim, and fired.

Jesse fired at Carl Greene, but did not allow for the sinking of the ball at such a great distance.

The shot whistled through the air, and Carl Greene's horse gave a bound into the air, and struck out spasmodically with his fore feet.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Carl Greene fired three shots at the bandit king, but his pistol was of too short a range to reach him.

He saw the bullets strike up the dust behind the flying highwayman.

Carl Greene dismounted.

"I'll see how bad my poor beast is hurt," he thought.

The unfortunate animal was trembling from head to foot, and when he went before it he saw its breast was covered with blood.

"Poor fellow! You are done for."

The horse was suffering great pain, for he groaned, and when a horse groans he suffers.

Carl Greene was a kind-hearted man. Nothing was more calculated to rouse his sympathy than a dumb animal suffering. He almost forgot the boasting outlaw in his sympathy for his steed.

He led him down a narrow lane to a farm house, where lived an old Missouri farmer.

"Wot yer got thar, er siek hoss?" asked the farmer, when he was called from the house.

"Yes."

"Why, his breast air all covered with blood."

"The horse was hurt."

"How?"

"By a bullet."

"Shot?"

"Yes."

"Who did it?"

"A fellow down the road shot at me and hit my horse."

"Shot at yer! Wall, I swau, but et do beat all."

"Now my poor beast is about done for," said Carl Greene. "He will be unable, I fear, to recover from this wound, and I want to leave him with you. Take care of him until he dies, which will be in a day or two, I believe. Meawhile, I must be going."

"Wall, stranger—d'yer think I'm er goin' ter doctor sick horses fur nothin'."

"No—here is ten dollars."

"Wall, that air some considerashun any way."

"Now have you any horses?"

"Horses! why, yes."



"Have you a good one?"

"Good saddle hoss?"

"Yes."

"Wall, thar's Merrylegs; she air a fust rate mare, with good speed and bottom."

"What will you take for her?"

"Come and look at her."

There are some excellent horses in Missouri. No class of men are more proud of their horses than Missourians. Frequently in the home of the humblest farmer one will find a thorough bred racer.

The old farmer led out from his barn a young mare, four or five years old, whose long, tapering limbs and elegant form, with hair fine as silk, indicated a thoroughbred blooded horse.

"Thar, stranger, air ez fine a mare ez yer ever sot eyes on in all yer life. Jist look at them legs; ef she can't git over ground now, I'm a liar."

"How much do you ask for her?" Carl Greene asked.

Without answering his question, the old man went on:

"An' jest look at that air head, won't yer? Did yer ever see a purtier head in all yer born days, my honey? Now, ain't that head suthin' ter talk erbout?"

"What is your price for her?"

"Now, that air won is er racer. She kin run er three mile heat an' never tire."

"I want to know something about your price."

"Wall, stranger, wot'll yer give?"

"Two hundred."

"Oh, fiddlesticks! Hyar, Bob, go'n put up Merrylegs."

"Can't you set your price?"

"Five hundred dollars."

Carl Greene, with a laugh, said:

"Very well, sir; you may go and put her up."

"Hold on, stranger, don't yer go ter bein' too rambunkeious. Don't fly off ther handle, but tell me wot'll yer give?"

"I can't give over two hundred and fifty. We are only half way together, so you had as well go and put up the mare."

"Make it three."

"I won't."

"Two seventy-five?"

"Two fifty and not one dollar more."

"Not er dollar?"

"Not a dollar. Now I am going."

"Hold on!"

"Put up your mare."

"Don't yer be in a sweat."

"But I am in a hurry and have no time to talk."

"It's a trade?"

"At two fifty?"

"Two sixty-two and a half."

"No."

"Sixty?"

"No."

"Fifty-five?"

"I have no time to talk with you."

Carl Greene turned abruptly about, when the old man cried:

"Wall, two-fifty, then."

"It was well you gave your price before I had fairly got started, or I should not have stopped at any price."

Carl Greene quickly transferred his saddle from the wounded horse to the new purchase, paid the two hundred and fifty dollars for the animal, and mounted his steed.

His wounded horse was lying down when he rode away, and two hours later was dead. The bullet fired by Jesse James found lodgment in its lungs, inflicting a fatal wound.

Carl Greene had again changed his disguise.

Jesse James he knew would linger for a day or two longer in the lowlands, and he had a faint hope—very faint, it is true, yet a faint hope that he would find him.

"If I don't find the rascal here, he will go back to the mountains, for he is not yet done with the Grace Harvey matter."

That night the detective passed in an old mill.

At early dawn he mounted his new horse and rode over to a farm house not more than two miles away and there procured his breakfast and feed for his horse.

"Where be yer agoin'?" asked the farmer, while he was at breakfast.

"To Hackett's store," Carl Greene answered.

"Hackett's store?" cried the old man.

"Why, la' me, et do seem ez though thar air er lot o' you fellers goin' ter Hackett's."

"Who else is going there?" Carl Greene asked.

"That other fellow."

"What other fellow?"

"Dun know his name. He war goin' ter Hackett's."

"When did you see him?"

"Tuk breakfast hyar not over ten ur fifteen minutes ago."

Carl Greene was now interested in the stranger.

He asked:

"What was he like?"

"Er big man with blue eyes an' red head an' whiskers."

The hair and whiskers Carl Greene did not consider for a moment, for he knew if it was Jesse James, he was more than likely in deep disguise.

"What sort of a horse did he ride?"

"Dun know, pilgrim, fur ter tell yer ther squar, honest truth, the hoss war all so kivered up with blankets that we couldn't tell hardly wot color he war."

"I looked under ther blanket," put in a bright boy, about ten years old.

"Did you?"

"Yes."

"What color was the horse?"

"Black."

"Black!" cried Carl Greene. Then he thought:

"It was Jesse James beyond a doubt."

Even then he realized that Jesse James might be lurking near, ready to send a bullet through his brain at the first favorable opportunity.

But Carl Greene was cool. He slowly and almost carelessly ate his breakfast without even a tremor.

"How long since has this been?" he asked.

"Hev what been?" asked the farmer.

"Since the man with the blanketed horse was here."

"T'aint been long, pilgrim?"

"Not ten minutes," put in the boy.

"It war jist afore you came."

"What, so late as that?"

"Yes."

"Which way did he go?"

"Went down the road."

"That way?" asked Carl Greene, pointing to the south-west.

"Yes."

"That was the way I came, and it is rather strange that I did not meet with him."

"It was."

"There is no road by which he could have turned off?"

"None till ye come ter ther skule house on Beaver Branch."

"The school house—why that is five miles away."

"Bout that pilgrim."

"And I did not meet him; then he did not follow the road."

"No; here I am, Carl Greene," cried a voice at the window.

Carl Greene glanced over his right shoulder and espied a no less personage than Jesse James himself, with a cocked revolver leveled at his head.

"Ah! Carl Greene, I've got you now. Sit still, don't move, or it will cost you your life."

Carl Greene knew that Jesse James could have no other design than to kill him.

To sit still was to be bored through with a bullet. Jesse James had resolved to kill him in his cruel, cool, slow manner, by delivering a lecture to him first, and shooting him through. But Carl Greene resolved not to be slain in any such manner. He was cool and determined.

"Go on, Jesse James," he said. "I hope you will give me an opportunity, however, to eat my breakfast."

"Yes."

Carl reached his right hand forward and seized a bottle of pepper sauce as if to apply it to his meat. The bottle was large of cut glass and quite heavy. Instead of using the pepper sauce on his meat he suddenly hurled it through the window at Jesse's head.

The bottle smashed the glass, struck Jesse's revolver and breaking scattered the fragments and liquid over the bandit king, who gave utterance to a yell and fired a shot at random.

Carl Greene was under the table when the bullet struck it. He had his revolver in his hand and fired two shots through the window in quick succession.

Jesse, realizing his danger, wheeled Siroc about, leaped a fence, and went galloping across a meadow. Carl Greene ran out of the house, sprang upon the back of his horse, and away he flew in hot pursuit across the meadow.

"Halt, Jesse James!"

Crack! went Carl Greene's pistol.

The ball whizzed uncomfortably near to the bandit chief's head, and he said:

"Siroe, we must get along faster, for that fellow rides a good horse."

Carl Greene, knowing that a hard race was before him, said:

"Merrylegs, I will have a chance to test your speed and endurance."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

CARL GREENE AND FLYNN.

THOUGH Merrylegs proved a superior animal she could not come up with the fleet-footed Siroc.

There never lived a horse that was the equal of Siroc in speed and endurance. Carl Greene soon realized that he was losing ground and would have to give up the chase.

Away they went flying over the meadow in the direction of the mountains or Hackett's store.

"I will lose him this time," the detective thought, "but I will find him again."

Three days later a man with iron-gray beard, mounted on a spirited but somewhat jaded horse rode to the little hamlet called Hackett. He dismounted at the only public house the place contained. Here he called for a stable boy who came and put up his horse.

"Feed him, plenty of oats and hay, and but little corn," said the man.

Hackett's was at the foot of the Ozark mountains, and the stranger turned his gaze up in the direction of those tall elevations, crowned with verdure to their very summit.

"I think I will climb that mountain before many days," he said.

"Why?" asked a half tipsy fellow at his side.

"Just to say I have been on the Ozark."

"Say, stranger, 'speat you'd better stay away from them mountains."

"Why, sir, why do you think I had?"

"Because the Midnight Horseman is up there—the silent rider of the Ozarks roams over the place. Look out for him."

"Who is he?"

"A ghost—a spook."

The horseman smiled as he fixed his keen eyes on the flushed face of the speaker.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Silas Flynn."

"You live in the neighborhood?"

"Yes."

"Have you lived long among the mountains?"

"All my life."

Then he became silent and the stranger asked:

"Do you ever drink?"

"Drink?"

"Yes, I asked if you ever drank."

"Well, sometimes, stranger. Say, who be you?"

"My name is Terril. Allen Terril."

"Where from?"

"Moberly."

"Moberly, Missouri?"

"Yes."

"I was there once."

"Now let's go in and have a drink."

As the reader has no doubt surmised the pretended Allen Terril was none other than Carl Greene, the prince of detectives.

"Well, Terril, I believe I'll go an' drink with ye. When did ye leave Moberly?"

"Three days ago."

"What are you doing here?"

By this time the two had reached the public house, entered the bar-room and seated themselves at a table.

"I came," said Greene, "to buy some pine timber. You see I am going to start a big mill at Moberly, and want all the pine logs I can get."

"I see."

When Carl Greene had bought two glasses of whisky and had given one to Flynn, who drank it, and while he poured the other out, he said:

"Now, Mr. Flynn, I want you to help me."

"Do ye?"

"Yes."

"Well, maybe I can."

"You are perfectly well acquainted in the mountains?"

"Ye bet I am."

"Know every foot of them?"

"I do."

"Don't you want another driuk?"

"Don't care if I do, for to tell ye the truth, Mr. Terril, I feel jist like a new man, I do, and now I want to drink with the new man."

Two more glasses of whisky were called for, and the half drunk Silas Flynn emptied one into his already overloaded stomach, and Carl Greene managed to pour the other into a spittoon near.

The liquor began to have its effect on Silas. The detective saw that he had him at about the right point, and began.

"You say you live here?"

"Of course I do."

"How long have you lived in this neighborhood?"

"All m'life."

"Now, I want to know if I can hire you to assist me in buying the pine timber."



"How much will ye give me?"  
 "One thousand dollars."  
 "Do it."  
 "You will go with me?"  
 "Yer bet."  
 "When?"  
 "Any time."  
 "Where are the most trees?"  
 "On the Spruce plateau, just above the chute."  
 "How far from here is it?"  
 "'Bout six or seven miles, that's all."  
 Carl Greene drew a handful of bills from his pocket, and handing fifty dollars to the half drunken Flynn, said:  
 "There—that will bind the bargain."  
 "Yes, ye bet it will."  
 "Now are you willing to start out at once?"  
 "I am."  
 "But Flynn; a word before you go."  
 "What?"  
 "How about the Midnight Horseman?"  
 "Ah, he is all right."  
 "Won't he kill us?"  
 "No, he won't harm us. I know him—he won't touch me."  
 "You know him?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Who is he?"  
 "Now, do you never mind, for he won't harm us, I tell ye."  
 "But I don't know him. He knows nothing of me and might take it into his head to kill me."  
 "No, he won't."  
 "Why?"  
 "Because he wouldn't dare touch a friend of mine. We're on a deal."  
 "A deal?"  
 "Yes."  
 "What sort of a deal?"  
 "It's a deal that's got some money and a gal mixed up in it; but there now, I won't tell ye nuthin' about it."  
 "Do you suppose that he will play fair with you?"  
 "Course he will."  
 "People say he is an outlaw, don't they?"  
 "Yes. You've heard about him, have you?"  
 "I have. And from what I've heard I don't care to meet him. Now, is he on that pine bluff you spoke about?"  
 "Yes."  
 "What? Do I have to go near him?"  
 "Ye do."  
 "On the same plateau where he is?"  
 "Yes, but don't ye be afraid. I tell ye now that I stand on the inside with 'em. He's got my gal, holdin' her until she gives in an' marries me."  
 "On that same plateau?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Let us go and look at the timber on the bluff. I want it over with just as soon as possible."  
 They had not traveled far in the open air before Flynn began to get sober.  
 "Now look ye hyar, Mr. Terril, ye won't go for to tellin' anything o' what I've told ye, will you?"  
 "Oh, no."  
 "Mought get me in trouble, ye see."  
 "I wouldn't do that for anything."  
 They had reached the top of the bluff, and were crowding their way through the pines when half a dozen tall, powerful men rose up as suddenly before them as if they had sprang right out of the ground.  
 "Trapped!" thought Carl Greene, feeling for his revolver.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## BACK TO THE OZARKS.

"Hold!" cried a deep, sepulchral voice.  
 "Look out."  
 Some one made a leap at Carl Greene.  
 "Whack!"  
 His fist came with a ringing whack on the man's head and down he went.  
 Carl Greene had drawn his pistol but was too closely pressed to use it.  
 Crack!  
 Crack!  
 Crack!  
 Sharp, stuning reports, and whizzing bullets came from every side, all about him, and the detective ran half a dozen narrow escapes from being pierced with bullets.  
 The trees were quite thick on every hand, and half a dozen bounds had placed him beyond reach of their vision or bullets.  
 But Carl Greene was not one to entirely run away from the scene. He had been led into a trap, it was quite evident, but he was determined if it were possible to turn the trap against them.  
 Consequently he climbed into a low, bushy tree, an oak which grew among the tall pines, and lay there all snugly concealed from view, while he listened to what was going on below.  
 A voice which was unmistakably Jesse James' was saying:  
 "You drunken loafer, I have a mind to kill you."

"Better change yer mind, Jesse, because I ain't done nothin' to be killed for, as I can see."  
 "You lie, you hound! Didn't you bring him here?"  
 "He just wanted to buy this timber and hired me to bring him. Give me fifty dollars and here it is."  
 "You idiot! You were only a decoy to lead him to our hiding-place. Do you know who he is?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Who?"  
 "Allen Terril, from Moberly."  
 "He is not."  
 "But he is."  
 "I say he is not."  
 "Why he told me so."  
 "And you believed him, you soft-headed fool! I suppose you unbosomed all our plans to him?"  
 "No, I didn't."  
 "Well, I believe you did."  
 "Didn't tell him a thing."  
 "Why were you leading him right to our hiding-place?"  
 "I was not."  
 "You lie."  
 "See here, Jesse James, don't ye go for to collin' me a liar more'n a dozen times."  
 "Silas Flynn, you drunken loafer, I have a notion to send a bullet to the hollow place in your head, where the brains ought to be."  
 "I ain't done nuthin'."  
 "You have done everything; you led Carl Greene to our hiding place, and you ought to be killed for that."  
 "Move ther gal away. Take her away."  
 "Where will we take her?"  
 "Ain't ye got some other place where ye can take her to?"  
 "No."  
 "Then by bread and gluger snaps, make the girl marry me right away, and have it over with."  
 Jesse James was then heard to consult a few moments with others of his band.  
 "It's the best," Jim Cummins was heard to say.  
 "Can it be done?"  
 "Of course."  
 "Who'll do it?"  
 "I don't know; he knows who he can get to do the job."  
 Then they appealed to Silas Flynn, who for the last few moments had been left entirely to himself.  
 "Silas, do you know any preacher near here?"  
 "Dun no. Never had very much to do with preachers. Don't like 'em."  
 "Oh, I suppose not, but if that wedding becomes a reality, you will have to have something to do with one."  
 "Why?"  
 "A preacher must tie the knot."  
 Silas Flynn reflected a moment and then said:  
 "There is old Nop Williams. Can't preach much."  
 "Has he a license?"  
 "Oh, yes; but they say he is unscrupulous, and they do talk o' takin' 'em from him."  
 "Does he love money?"  
 "Ye bet he does. Why, he'll do anything for money."  
 "He is the man we want!" cried Jesse.  
 "Where does he live?"  
 "Down in the little cabin at the foot of the mountain, on left bank Racoon Creek."  
 "We'll go and get him."  
 Carl Greene heard their resolution, and a bold plan at once entered his head. A plan which for daring and boldness never had its equal.  
 He determined to go to the cabin by fair means or by force, make Williams allow him to assume his character and play the part of the preacher in the prospective marriage.  
 As soon as the enemy had withdrawn to a distance which would make it safe for him to act, he slid down to the ground and ran down a narrow mountain path.  
 "I believe I know where the cabin of old Nop Williams is," he thought. "Now, if I can get there, I will assume the part of the old humbug, and if I can only get to where the girl is, I will rescue her or die in the effort."  
 Carl Greene was a man, as the reader of this story probably knows, of wonderful endurance and speed, while his courage was unlimited.  
 It required a man of iron nerve to attempt a scheme as bold as his, for he would by this act, be placing himself almost wholly in their power, depending wholly upon a disguise, which might be seen through at a glance.  
 He ran, he leaped, he climbed, he fell and rolled, paying but little heed to bruise, or scratches, and out of breath he at last reached the cottage of the old man.  
 It was dark.  
 "Can it be that the old fellow is not at home?" asked Carl. "No, he is perhaps asleep."  
 Going to the door he rapped.  
 There came a hollow, empty sound from within.

Again he rapped.  
 No answer.  
 Carl Greene was growing desperate. The James Boys he knew were coming, and would soon surround the house. If he succeeded with his plan he must work at once, and with his clenched fist he gave the door such a whack that it made the old shanty tremble to its very center.  
 At this demonstration of anxiety there was a shuffling within, and a voice said:  
 "Who is there?"  
 "Me."  
 "Who are you?"  
 "Some one you never saw or heard of, open the door, I have news for you."  
 "What is it?"  
 "Good news, open the door."  
 The old man opened the door just a little, and poked out his nose.  
 Carl Greene boldly pushing it open entered.  
 "Light a candle or lamp," said Carl.  
 "What d'ye want?"  
 "I'll tell you when it's lighted."  
 "If you be one o' the James Boys I am your friend. I've got no money."  
 "I don't doubt your friendship. Come light the lamp or candle. I want to see you."  
 The old man struck a match, and in a moment had a lamp lighted. Carl Greene looked at him, and said:  
 "It strikes me that we are about the same height."  
 "Yes."  
 "And complexion?"  
 "Yes."  
 "Sit down."  
 The detective seated himself before a mirror, and took out a pair of false whiskers and wig. They were of the same gray color and length of the old man's.  
 These he proceeded to put on, and then by the use of some paints, continued working away on his features, completely metamorphosing or changing himself.  
 The old mountain preacher was amazed to see that every stroke made the curious stranger more and more resemble himself.  
 At last he finished and stood up.  
 "Now look in the glass and tell me what you think of the resemblance."  
 He did so, and gave utterance to an exclamation of surprise.  
 "It is wonderful," he said.  
 "Do you think so?"  
 "I do."  
 "Now let me see—to make it more complete I want a suit of your clothes to pull on over these."  
 He took down a suit of clothes and began to put them on over his.  
 "Say, stranger," called the old man.  
 "Well, what?" asked Carl.  
 "Don't you think you are takin' too many liberties for your first visit?"  
 "Oh, no."  
 "I do."  
 "Now, listen to me, I want to take your place for a while."  
 "What?"  
 "I want to be you."  
 "Who will I be?"  
 "Nobody."  
 "Are you mad?"  
 "No."  
 "You act very much that way."  
 "I am going to receive some visitors soon, and I don't know what to do with you."  
 "I think ye'd better go away."  
 "Not yet. Come."  
 "Where?"  
 "I see you have a cellar."  
 "Don't touch me."  
 "Why?"  
 "I'll scream out."  
 "Then I'll gag you."  
 The old reprobate, fearing that he was about to be arrested, showed some signs of resistance, but Carl Greene leveled a pistol at his head and said:  
 "Come now, no resistance. For crimes you have already committed you deserve to die, but I have no wish to kill you. So keep quiet and be bound and gagged, and all will go well."  
 The preacher sank down on his knees and raised his hands.  
 "Don't—don't harm me," he groaned.  
 In a trice Carl Greene had bound and gagged the man, and then hurried him down to the cellar.  
 "Now stay here and don't you attempt any ontry if you value your life."  
 He hurried up the steps to the room above, and extinguished the light.  
 "Some one is coming. It is they!" he said.  
 "I was not a second too soon."  
 He threw himself on the bed, and had scarce stretched himself out before there came a rap at the door.  
 "I won't go at the first knock," he thought.  
 Rap!  
 Rap!  
 Rap!  
 Then the voice of Jesse James could be heard saying:



"He may be gone."  
 "No, he is there," urged Silas Flynn. "He's never away at this hour."  
 "Say, get up!"  
 Jesse struck again.  
 "Hit it as hard as I did before I get up," Carl Greene thought.  
 "He is hard of hearing," Jim Cummis said.  
 "Yes," put in Silas.  
 Jesse then said:  
 "I'll wake him or have the door down!"  
 Crash came the fist of the bandit chief against the door.

The door trembled on its hinges, and a few moments later a squaky, trembling voice called out from within:

"Who air ye? Who air ye, and why do you try to knock in my door? Who are ye—who are ye?"

"Open this door, and you will see," cried Jesse James, in a fury.

To which the same squeaky old voice made answer:

"Now yer wouldn't go ter hurtin' a pore old feller like me, would yer?"

"No, you old fool," Jesse James laughingly answered. "Nobody would harm a hair of your wretched old head. We want your services."

"My sarvices?"

"Yes."

"Why kin yer want my sarvices?"

"There is going to be a wedding up in the mountains, and we want you to officiate at it."

"Will they pay?"

"The biggest fee you ever had Nop Williams, will be paid for this."

"Oh, la'—why, ain't you a jokin'?"

"No, I am telling you the gospel truth," Jesse James answered. Then the door opened, and the bandit king of America entered the wretched hut, where by the dim uncertain light, he espied an old man half dressed, gazing at him with a look of incredulity.

It must have been a trying ordeal for even Carl Greene, that man of steel nerves who possessed the coolest head of any detective in America. He was in the presence of the bandit king whom he had for years been endeavoring to arrest. But it was no part of Carl Greene's plan to arrest him at this moment.

Wild and desperate as the plan seems, the daring detective might have attempted it, even had it not been his design to find the abducted girl.

What his future plans would be he knew not, for he was resolved to depend principally upon circumstances.

"Yes, Nop Williams, my old gospel pounder, we've got a nice little job for you if you will do it neatly."

"I kin tie er matrimonial knot jist ez well ez any o' them fellers in St. Louis or Chicago, and I don't keer who they ar," returned Carl Greene, so completely mimicking the voice of Nop Williams that any one intimately acquainted with the old mountaineer could not have told that it was a deception.

"Then you are the man."

"When d'yer want it done?"

"Right away."

"At once?"

"Of course. Dress and let us be going."

"I'm pullin' on my ole boots and gittin' ready fast."

"Strike a light."

"Oh, I don't need it."

It was Carl Greene's design to have no more light than possible, for although he had effectually disguised himself to look like old "Nop Williams," he realized that he would be safer in the dark.

"Hurry up," said Jesse James, impatiently, Carl Greene in perfect imitation of the old mountaineer's voice, answered:

"I am erbout ready."

He drew on a coat, then his hat, and said:

"I am ready!"

Just a few words before we set out," said Jesse James to the preacher.

"What air it?"

"Suppose one of the parties to this marriage should be a little arbitrary—should object you know, would you go ahead and do it?"

"In course, ef I war paid for it."

"How much would you want?"

The pretended "Nop Williams," for a moment seemed to be studying the man before him, as if trying to size up his pile. At last he said:

"Two hundred."

"You shall have it. Now you must be blindfolded and have your hands tied."

"Why?" demanded the disguised detective. "I don't object ter doin' yer dirty work, but I hick on bein' tied an' blindfolded."

"It will do you no good to kick. We don't intend you shall see the road you travel over nor the place you enter."

"But why tie my hands?"

"So that you may not incautiously tear off the hoodwink at the moment when you don't think of what you are about."

"Well, go ahead. I reckon yer would not hurt a old feller like me."

"Oh, no, of course not."

The detective was blindfolded and his hands tied behind him, and in a few minutes led away between two of the bandits whose chief desire was to take his life. Never was man in more deadly peril. Discovery would be death, and at any moment some accident might reveal his identity. They marched to the Ozarks.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THROUGH THE NIGHT.

ONE of the bandits walked on either side of the detective, and he knew that two or three were before him and as many behind.

He was virtually a prisoner, yet he had his revolvers concealed beneath his coat. But of what use were revolvers to him while his hands were tied and his eyes covered with a handkerchief?

Carl Greene's scheme was desperate, but not a foolish one. He had anticipated everything from the first. He knew that he would be taken blindfolded into the cavern of the outlaws, and when he was once in the presence of the captive girl he would depend on his own boldness and shrewdness to rescue her.

Carl Greene knew what consternation a sudden unmasking of the officiating clergyman, a sudden whipping out a brace of revolvers would make among the outlaws.

Jesse would, of course, be near to him, and he resolved to shoot down Jesse, Frank and Jim Cummins, and terrify or exterminate the others.

A sudden and unexpected attack always throws an enemy into confusion, and he hoped by this confusion to escape with Grace Harvey.

His only excuse for adopting such a desperate means was that he had tried every other plan to find the hiding place of Grace Harvey and had failed.

For a long time the little company moved on in utter silence. At last a voice ahead whispered:

"We are nearly there."

"Halt!"

It was Jesse James' deep, stentorian lungs which issued the command.

The party came to a stand, and for a brief space not a word was uttered, nor did one move.

Jesse James again spoke, saying:

"Go forward, Jim, and reconnoiter and see if the way is clear."

Jim stole forward in the darkness so noiselessly that Carl Greene could scarcely hear his footsteps.

He could not but admire the discipline and caution of the James Boys. They knew how necessary discipline was, and never did well-trained soldiers obey the orders of their officers more promptly than did these outlaws respond to the command of the bandit chief.

Through the night Carl Greene lived in perpetual dread. Each moment might be his last. He had been cautioned not to speak, and preserved a strict silence.

At last Jim Cummins came back.

"All right," he said.

"Is the way clear?"

"Yes."

"You are sure Carl Greene is not watching from some bush or tree?"

"I am."

"Boys, what became of that detective?" Jesse James at last asked.

He seemed to forget the preacher was standing within hearing, or else he did not care what was said before him.

"I am sure I don't know," Frank James responded.

"He may at this very moment be watching us from some invisible point. He is a dangerous fellow, and when he seems to be nowhere in the country he is at your elbow."

Carl Greene could scarce repress a smile at the remark.

Soon he would be inside their grotto. The hidden mysteries of that hidden grotto would be his, and he would then make a desperate stroke to liberate the girl.

Standing in utter darkness, helpless, with his hands tied behind him, no wonder he trembled. Carl Greene would hardly have been human had he not trembled with dread.

Jesse James, who had not spoken to him since they left the cabin, now said:

"Old man, tie that knot hard and firm and all will go well. You shall have an extra hundred to the amount promised you, but if you refuse I will drive my knife to your heart. Don't you comprehend me?"

"Yes," he answered.

"Well, you know who I am?"

"Some o' the boys called ye Jesse James."

"That is just who and what I am. Now, if you know anything at all about Jesse James, you know he will not be trifled with. He is dangerous."

"Yes."

"Come on."

"I am comin'."

He was conducted carefully along, and he recognized the voice of Silas Flynn near, saying in an undertone:

"He is all right. I assure you Nop Williams is perfectly all right."

"It won't be any harm to give him a scare any way."

"Oh, no, but he must tie the knot, give me control over the girl, and then I can go to old Hackett and demand the will and papers."

"You shall have the knot tied as firm as you please."

They reached the mouth of the cavern and entered. Carl Greene was told to stoop at the entrance, but once inside, the ceiling rose higher, so he could stand erect.

He heard voices whispering near him, and was led gently along for a few paces until told to stop.

"Do you know where you are?" Jesse asked.

"No," he answered.

The bandage was removed from his eyes and his hands untied.

Carl Greene saw the wretched captive tied in a chair near him. She looked so sad and disconsolate that he was glad that he had risked so much to rescue her.

Jesse James was about to say something, when one of the bandits who was on guard near the entrance suddenly burst into the grotto.

"What's wrong?" the chief asked.

"There are strangers down there, and they are coming directly toward the cavern."

Jesse James stamped his foot on the ground, and gave vent to an exclamation of rage.

"We will teach them a lesson. Here, Bill Chadwell, guard the entrance, and we will all go out and lead Carl Greene a chase."

Jesse James was very much excited, and hurried out with his band, leaving the supposed parson standing untied and without being blindfolded in the cavern.

Bill Chadwell, who, supposing that the chief danger was at the mouth of the cavern, took up his post as sentry there.

Carl Greene was not slow to act. No sooner was he alone with the girl, than he darted swiftly to her side, and whispered:

"Don't be alarmed. I am your friend."

"What—"

"Whist; not a word. Trust in me."

Although she had been told not to speak, she could not resist the temptation to ask in a faint whisper:

"Who are you?"

"Carl Greene," he whispered. "Don't say another word—I will return soon and liberate you."

Carl Greene then went to the narrow corridor or passageway, and glanced at Bill Chadwell who was on duty. Bill's back was toward him, for of course the main interest of the bandit was outside, from whence the attack was expected.

This exactly suited the detective. He had no intention to kill the bandit, or even make him a prisoner. His only desire was, to escape with the young prisoner.

So absorbed was Bill Chadwell with what was transpiring without, that he did not dream of the proximity of the preacher until he was pounced down upon. Carl Greene clapped his fingers so closely about his throat that he could utter no outcry.

Bill Chadwell was quickly choked into insensibility and tied and gagged. Then the daring detective flew back with the speed of lightning to the captive girl and cut loose the bonds which bound her.

"Am I free?" she asked.

"Not yet. Follow me and do not faint," he whispered.

She followed him through the dark corridor. They passed where the sentry lay bound and gagged and helpless, and a few seconds more found them in the open air.

"Free, thank Heaven!" cried Grace.

"Free! No, fools! You are out of the frying-pan into the fire!" roared Jesse James, starting up from the bushes before them. "Ho, lads; here is something wrong! Gather about the cavern at once!"

And half a dozen dark forms started up about the fugitives.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE AGED BUCCANEER.

GRACE HARVEY was paralyzed with horror. She could neither speak nor move, and all she could do was to stand and wring her hands in silent agony.

To be free—to see the stars and sky once more after her long captivity, only to be seized again by her strange tormentors and dragged back to prison, was enough to freeze the young blood in her veins.

Jesse James, whom she had known only as Voljean, was to her the most terrible creature that existed.

She was dazed, confused and bewildered, and was only partially conscious of a few quick decisive blows, half a dozen flashes and reports of pistols; then some one seized her in their arms, and she was hurried away through the woods and over the stony uneven ground.

Her last recollection was of descending apparently into some dark abyss. The man who



was carrying her either leaped or fell down a precipice, she knew not which, but was certain that he had fallen.

She was so horrified with the anticipation of being crushed to death on the stones below that she fainted.

When she recovered she was lying on the ground and a man was kneeling by her side.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"Safe," whispered the man, whose form could only faintly be outlined in the darkness.

"Who are you? Are you Ben—Ben Morgan?" she asked.

"No."

"Who?"

"Carl Greene."

"The detective?"

"Yes."

"Did he send you?"

"Do you mean Ben Morgan?"

"I do."

"He did."

"Where are we?"

"We are on the north side of the mountain."

"And our pursuers?"

"Speak lower; don't let them know that we are here."

"Are they near?"

"They are all about us."

Then Carl Greene rose to his feet and crept a few feet away to a large stone, where he listened. Down the long slope he could occasionally hear the sound of a voice.

They were not out of danger yet by any means, he knew.

"If I could only connect with Ben Morgan and his friends," Carl Greene thought, "I would then be quite sure to rescue the girl, but they are between us and our friends. We are quite cut off, and I hardly know how to get around the enemy who flank us."

A bold plan suddenly entered the mind of the detective. The plan which suggested itself to him was full of danger, but as nearly all successful plans have more or less danger connected with them, and as he was accustomed to danger, he was not to be discouraged by the thought.

He crept further down the mountain side until he had located the exact position of their pursuers. He did not go near enough to hear what they said, but turning about, ran with the swiftness of a mountain stag to where he had left the girl.

"Miss Harvey, have you wholly recovered?" he asked.

"Yes, are they near?"

"Yes."

"Coming this way?"

"We would be discovered, killed or recaptured, should we remain here ten minutes longer," said Carl Greene.

"Then, Mr. Greene, what are we to do?" she asked.

"Are you very brave?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Do you know this side of the mountain?"

"No. I am an utter stranger here."

"And this side of the mountain is a perfect wilderness. Now my plan is to leave you."

"Alone on the mountain?"

"It is our only hope. Here is a path leading somewhere, I know not where. Follow it and see at what point it will terminate, meanwhile I will lead the James Boys, Silas Flynn and their minions a lively chase and draw them away from you."

The girl at once saw that his plan would be for the best.

Like any other girl she dreaded the lonely forest and mountain road after night, but there was no other alternative. She began her silent retreat down the mountain path.

About her were all the sounds of night. Occasionally the cry of a coon or the growl of some wild animal fell on her ear, but though she trembled she continued her flight. The night was well-nigh spent and the moon, from a cloudless sky, was shedding a silver light over the scene when, as she was descending a path, she suddenly came upon a mountain cabin.

The appearance of that cabin filled her with hope. At least here was a chance for life and safety. Cautiously she approached the cabin.

It was dark and silent, and but for an ax and ancient saw lying near the door, she might have thought it deserted.

"No, some one lives here," she thought, "and poor and miserable as they are, they are rich compared with me. Heaven grant they will listen to my story and take compassion on me."

She knew that while she might find some one in the house friendly to her, she might also find some monster who would hand her over to her pursuers in hope of reward. But she could but perish if she did knock, and she was resolved to try, for if she went on in that interminable wilderness, she realized that death was certain.

Slowly she advanced to the door of the cabin and paused a moment, while her heart beat wildly with dread and hope.

At last she raised her hand, and with her knuckle struck the door.

Rap!

Rap!

Rap!

Three little gentle taps, which could not have awakened a sound sleeper.

She listened, and was quite sure she heard some one snoring inside the cabin.

Again she rapped, this time louder than before, and heard some one stirring on a bed within.

"Who is there?" demanded a gruff voice.

"A poor girl who has become lost in the mountains."

She heard a heavy step on the floor, and then the door was partially opened and the roughest bearded face she had ever seen was poked out of the door.

"Hello! who are you?" asked the unprepossessing head.

"I am Grace Harvey."

"Who is Grace Harvey?"

"A young lady, lost in the forest."

"Well, why did ye come here?" demanded the gruff, unpleasant voice. "I live here all by myself. There hain't been a man, woman or child at my cottage for twenty years, and I don't want to see them neither."

"I beg your pardon if I have intruded," sighed Grace; "but I was lost, and by accident—mere accident—found your cottage."

"Come in, then, and if it was only accident, it's all right, but if you are a spy I will cut yer throat!"

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

Poor Grace, frightened almost out of her senses, tried to stammer out some words and then fly, but she seemed rooted to the spot and was unable to move. At last she gasped:

"Don't! I will go."

"No, ye won't, gal."

He seized her arm and she shrieked out in fear and fright.

"Shet up!"

She became silent.

"Now, then, listen ter me," hissed the old man.

"What do you wish to say?" she humbly asked.

"Are yer a spy?"

"No."

"Did yer come hyar ter kill me?"

"I swear I did not."

"All right," chuckled the strange and eccentric being. "It air all right, gal, now. Come in and I'll tell yer suthin'."

She dared not refuse him, and yet it was with a faltering step and faint heart that she entered the cottage of the stranger. By the light of the moon she saw that his eyes blazed with the strange fires of a lunatic.

Once inside, he closed and barred the door, then lighted an old-fashioned lamp.

"Now, I've got suthin ter tell yer," he growled. "I am a buccancer—a pirate; don't yer know wot thet means?"

"Yes."

"I hev been a pirate fur years until twenty years ago, when I give it up. I use ter live on this mounting when a child, then I run off an' went ter sea, an' fur er long time wor a sailor. I fell in with er pirate an' wor captured an' made jine 'em. I fit everybody after that—look on them things," he said, pointing to an array of boot pistols and boarding pikes and cutlasses. "I used ter use all o' them."

"Why, I've seen blood run like water, an' I've seen gold an' silver an' diamonds in reg'lar heaps. Yer dunno wot et air ter sec er million dollars o' gold an' diamonds. Wall, I do."

"But at last I got tired o' ther business, I ran away an' came hyar. I knowed ez how they'd kill me if they got me, an' the law'd kill me ef et got hold on me, an so between ther two I war in a purty clus place."

"Now it's been twenty years thet I've lived in this ere cabin, an' yer ther fust pusson ez has ever been to it."

At first Grace Harvey was somewhat incredulous about his story. She could hardly believe that a man had lived all that time within a few miles of Hackett's store, and not be discovered. But after she had considered the deep jungles, the forests and mountain wilds about the hidden home of the aged buccancer, she thought it possible.

All the time she sat in silence before the aged buccancer, he was glaring at her with an almost savage ferocity. At last he asked:

"Wall, ain't yer goin' ter say suthin'?"

"What must I say?"

"I want ter know how yer come lost in ther mountings."

She proceeded to tell him of her captivity by the Midnight Horseman, whom she suspected to be Jesse James.

"Who is Jesse James? Yer must remember I hev been hyar in these mountings fur years, and see nobody an' talk with nobody."

She explained that Jesse James was one of the James Boys, a notorious band of robbers and cutthroats, and that she was arrested at the instigation of one Silas Flynn who wished to marry her.

"Silas Flynn, war he er son o' old Thomas Flynn?" asked the buccancer.

"Yes."

"Say, gal, air he yer enemy?"

"The worst enemy one ever had," she answered.

"Now put her thar," holding out his hand.

"What do you mean, sir?" she asked.

"Gal, I may stretch my neck by goin' inter ther land o' civilization, for I've forfeited my life, but I'll do it. I hate them Flynns, an' I have good cause to hate 'em, too. I never knowed Silas Flynn, but his father did me a awful wrong oncc, an' I ain't never forgot. I'm goin' ter help yer out o' this."

"Oh, will you?"

"Yes. Tell me now wot yer want me ter do?"

"Take me to Hackett's as soon as possible."

"I will."

It was now almost daylight, and the old buccancer rose and went to the door.

He returned and donned his coat and hat.

"Say, gal, yer hungry, bean't yer?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I knowed it. Yer got ter hev suthin' ter eat afore yer take er long mornin' tramp, ain't yer?"

"I should like to."

"Wall, I'll jist git up er little smack o' grub, an' then we'll be goin'."

In an incredibly short time the old man had prepared breakfast, and she ate heartily. It was a strange meal. Wild venison and corn cakes made from meal which the old man had ground between two stones, for he had become his own millright.

During his years of hermit life on the Ozark mountain, the aged buccancer seldom went to any settlement, and never in the daytime.

His nocturnal visits were predatory incursions to procure food for himself, and he took great pains not to leave any trail by which he could be followed.

When they were almost ready to go, he asked:

"Wot did yer say yer name war, gal?"

"My name is Grace Harvey."

"Wot war yer pa's name—Henry Harvey?"

"Yes."

"An' yer ma war Sarah Harvey?"

"Yes."

"Sarah Jones afore she war married?"

"Jones was her maiden name," answered Grace, in amazement. "What do you know about them?"

"I know lots, gal."

"Did you know my father?"

"Long afore you did."

"And my mother?"

"Knowed her afore she war married."

Grace Harvey was amazed, and, turning full upon him, asked:

"Who are you?"

"Not now, gal—not now," he answered.

"Come, let us be er movin'."

The sun had risen and they began their weary march around the mountain rather than across it, for they did not care to meet with any of the James Boys or the silent rider.

Grace's strange companion was heavily armed. He had a rifle on his shoulder and a brace of revolvers at his belt with a heavy cutlass dangling at his side.

They traveled all day through an almost pathless forest. Around the mountain on the north there were at this time but few houses. People had not attempted to build houses on the steep sides of the Ozarks.

When night came Grace was exhausted with her long tramp over the rough and uneven ground.

The old man had been very kind to her ever since he learned that she was Grace Harvey.

He made a camp fire and having shot a hare dressed it for her supper. After her supper had been cooked the camp-fire was extinguished lest it would betray them to some of the outlaws who were in possession of the mountain, and they began their march to the town of Hackett.

They had not gone far until they found it so dark they were compelled to halt and wait until the moon had risen, before they could proceed further.

For two hours they waited and then the moon rose and flooded the mountain side with light.

"Say, gal, I reckon we can't be far, air we?"

Grace looked about for some familiar object and answered:

"No, I don't think we are far."

"Jist go down thar a leetle way, gal, an' see ef yer don't see some familiar featur."

He pointed toward a bluff not far off, and she went to the edge of it. Below was the valley, and not three miles away was Hackett. She could see the big store with its broad square front.

"There is the town—and I see my home across the hills," she cried. "Come, let us go, we can be there in an hour."

The old buccancer without a word of objection to going into the settlement which he had so long dreaded, said:



"Come on, gal, I'll see yer through ter ther cend, ur bust er biler in tryin'."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### CONCLUSION.

REMARKABLE events were transpiring with marvelous rapidity in the Ozarks.

Carl Greene after parting with Grace Harvey, set out across a bit of sloping forest, to lead the outlaws a lively chase, and get them as far as possible from the girl, whom he hoped would be able to make her way back to the settlement of Hackett.

He had not gone far ere he actually ran against one of the outlaws' sentries, with such force as to knock him over.

Knowing his danger, Carl Greene took to his heels and ran at the top of his speed down the sloping ground.

Two or three shots were fired at him.

He was running at full speed, when he came suddenly upon a place where there was an offset in the mountain, on a precipice ten or twelve feet.

There was no other way to escape the bandits who were close at his heels than to leap from the precipice, which he did.

A horseman was below him.

He did not see him until he had made the leap, then, to his horror, he discovered that he was leaping right on "the Midnight Horseman, the Silent Rider of the Ozarks," or Jesse James.

Carl Greene lit astride of Jesse James' neck, and the bandit king of America gave utterance to a wild yell of rage and fear.

Siroc, alarmed at the sudden double weight, and frightened at the wild cry of his master, fled at full speed.

It was a wild, thrilling scene. A horse dashing at full speed adown the rocky slope, with two men on his back fighting with each other.

There was no time to draw a pistol, for they had to each cling to the animal's mane with one hand and pound each other with their fists with the other.

At last a tree swept off the detective, and then Jesse James quickly got control of his horse, seated himself firmly in the saddle, and wheeling his steed about, rode back to where the detective had fallen.

"I will kill the infernal scoundrel now!" Jesse hissed through his teeth. "Did ever any one hear of such an infamous act? Leap right on my shoulders!"

But when Jesse returned to the spot he found the detective gone.

"Surely the fellow must be a wizzard," he declared.

Jesse knew that he was liable to be assailed with a bullet at any moment, and turning his horse in the direction of his band, galloped back toward them as rapidly as he could possibly go.

The bandit chief sounded his whistle, and calling the band about him told them of his adventure.

"The girl can't be far away," he said. "Scatter out and bring her back."

But the search of the outlaws proved in vain. The girl could not be found.

Next day the bandits assembled at one of their rendezvous, and Jesse James said:

"We have now two experienced burglars whom I found while at St. Louis. Let us make an assault on the store to-night and the burglars can go through the safe."

"Yes—yes; make an assault on the place to-night," cried another of the bandits.

So it was agreed to try Hackett's store that night. The two burglars, Big Jack and Slippery Tom, once well known in St. Louis and Chicago, were with them. Big Jack, who was somewhat inclined to boast, said:

"Jist yer gin us er sight o' ther safe, an' Slippery Tom an' I'll go through et, won't we, Slippery?"

"Now yer kin jist bet we will."

"It's all agreed to," put in Jesse James.

"We will try it."

Consequently on the very night that the aged buccaneer and Grace Harvey were making their way to Hackett's store, the bandits, after carefully reconnoitering the place, had surrounded it.

"Is there any one in the store?" Silas Flynn, who was one of the party, asked.

"No, not a soul."

Silas Flynn hoped to get hold of the last will and testament of his relative, Joseph Young, deceased.

"If I get hold of Uncle Joe Young's will, I will destroy it, then the girl can't have but a part of it anyway," he said.

"Are you certain that the will gives you the property on the condition that she marries you?" asked Jesse.

"I have heard as much."

"Oh, half you hear nowadays is a lie."

"Well, we will see."

They surrounded the great store and the burglars began their work. They were masters of their profession, and soon after entering the house, forced their way into the door of the vault.

"Will you blow open the door?" Jesse asked. "I don't know. Maybe we can cut off the bolts and hinges; in that case there will be no need to blow it open."

They worked away deliberately at the door, and reports came to Jesse and all on guard without that they were making good headway.

At last the door was opened, and the burglars rushed into the vault.

"Flash a glim, Slippery," said big Jack.

At this moment a lantern threw a flood into the vault, and Carl Greene, who was secreted within it, rose, and covering them with his revolvers, cried:

"Surrender!"

They threw up their hands, and the two assistants of Carl Greene, Ben Morgan and old Hardtack, disarmed them and placed on the handcuffs.

"Now, boys, we will have some fun," said the detective, who, having that day learned the plan of Jesse James, had had himself and the two assistants locked up in the vault, and were ready when the James Boys with their burglars came.

Carl Greene took a whistle from one of the burglars and went to a window.

He blew a low keen blast.

"They've got it—they've got the will!" cried Silas Flynn. "I will never sleep sound until it is destroyed."

Jesse James tried to restrain him, but in vain.

The outlaws ran toward the house and were entering it, when one of them discovered old Hardtack, who, impetuous old veteran as he was, leaped to a window and shouted:

"Ho, comrades, repel the assault!"

"You have given my plan away," cried Carl Greene.

"Can't help it, comrade. I'm chuck full o' flight."

Bang, bang!

Crack, crack, pop! rang shots right and left. Ben Morgan saw his enemy, the man who abducted Grace and had caused him so much misery before him, and fired at him with murderous intent.

Old Hardtack was firing, and so was Carl Greene, while Jesse and his men were pouring in a rain storm of bullets at them.

But the detective and his companions had an advantage in being in a house, and in the darkness.

Two of Jesse James' men fell dead, and Jim Cummins, Frank James and Clell Miller were wounded.

Jesse sounded the retreat, and they mounted their horses and left the Ozarks that very night, never to return.

Silas Flynn was dead, and all hope of realizing anything from him was at an end.

Silas and a man named Gus Fleming were both killed dead in the fight.

Then they knew that all the treasure in the vault at Hackett's store would either be closely guarded or removed.

It was unprofitable and dangerous, for the hunters and mountaineers of the Ozarks were all up in arms against them, and the James Boys never came to the Ozarks again.

Scarce had the smoke of battle rolled away from Hackett's and the frightened inhabitants gotten out of their beds, when Grace Harvey and her strange guide came in.

Her mother was overjoyed to see her, and could scarcely believe that she was restored.

"How did you get back?" asked Carl Greene. "I tried to find you, but could not."

Grace told her story, and introduced her guide, the old buccaneer.

"Air ye Sarah Harvey?" asked the buccaneer.

"Yes," Mrs. Harvey answered.

"Yer hed a leetle brother once who was called Peter, a boy who war wild an' ravin', but hed a good heart."

"I did—and he ran away from home, and Pete Jones was never heard from any more."

"Yer thort o' course he was dead?"

"We did."

"He warn't."

"Did you know him?"

"I am Peter Jones, yer brother, and don't yer know me?"

"Yes, yes, I see the scar on your cheek, you are Pete—my brother, Pete."

The old buccaneer was in reality the brother of Mrs. Harvey and Grace's uncle.

His wild misdeeds at sea had been too long ago for him to be molested now.

Peter Jones had never been molested, and was really never a pirate except from compulsion, and since he has become a civilized man again, is a good citizen.

A few more words and we have finished.

The will it was found divided the property of Mr. Joe Young, deceased, equally between Grace, and her brother, John Harvey.

Grace and Ben Morgan were married, and Ben is now a half owner in Hackett's store, while John Harvey is a rich merchant in Chicago.

Though the James Boys never came back to the Hackett neighborhood again, the people there still remember the MIDNIGHT HORSEMAN OR THE SILENT RIDER OF THE OZARK.

[THE END.]

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